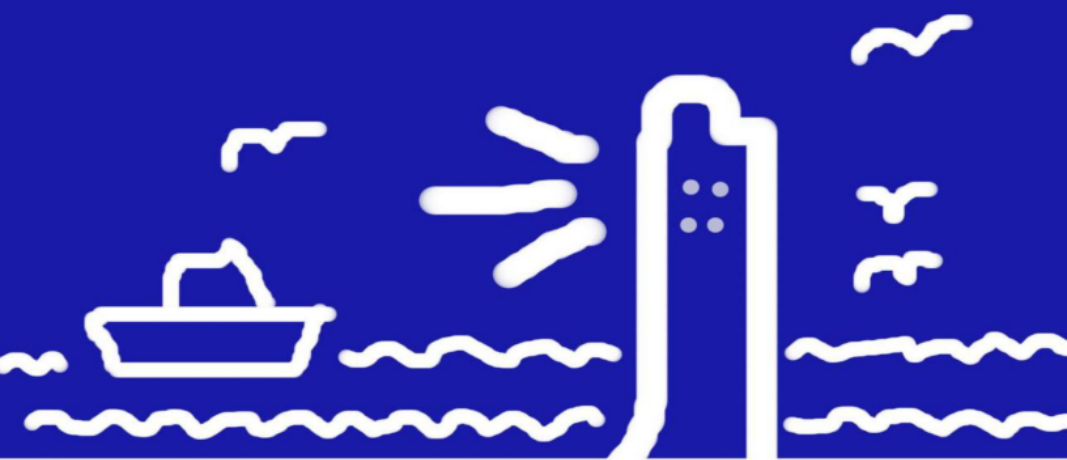


A Collection of 14 International Short Stories



K. Sterling

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K. Sterling

2024

[This collection of international short stories is offered completely free, making it accessible to all readers.]

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Prologue

Drawing from authors who live throughout the world, but who are connected by their narrating abilities and deep cultural backgrounds, this book brings together 14 stories that doesn't just tell a simple tale, rather it paints picture. Although these stories are based in different times and places, they weave a variegated picture of mankind.

The selection of these stories is based on their literary excellence, and their ability to inspire thought and arouse emotion. No one is trying to make money and the whole book is offered for free.

I hope you enjoy, and will find depth in these stories written by talented writers with unique voices and styles. Lose yourself in these tales and let them touch your heart, sway your thoughts and ignite your imagination all the way over to a far land boundless in wilderness. We hope you will enjoy this writer's journey. Good reading!

The Lighthouse Keeper

By Henryk Sienkiewicz. (1846-1916)

Translated by Jeremiah Curtin.

I

On a time it happened that the lighthouse keeper in Aspinwall, not far from Panama, disappeared without a trace. Since he disappeared during a storm, it was supposed that the ill-fated man went to the very

edge of the small, rocky island on which the lighthouse stood, and was swept out by a wave. This supposition seemed the more likely as his boat was not found next day in its rocky niche. The place of lighthouse keeper had become vacant. It was necessary to fill this place at the earliest moment possible, since the lighthouse had no small significance for the local movement as well as for vessels going from New York to Panama. Mosquito Bay abounds in sandbars and banks. Among these navigation, even in the daytime, is difficult; but at night, especially with the fogs which are so frequent on those waters warmed by the sun of the tropics, it is nearly impossible. The only guide at that time for the numerous vessels is the lighthouse.

The task of finding a new keeper fell to the United States consul living in Panama, and this task was no small one: first, because it was absolutely necessary to find the man within twelve hours; second, the man must be unusually conscientious — it was not possible, of course, to take the first comer at random; finally, there was an utter lack of candidates. Life on a tower is uncommonly difficult, and by no means enticing to people of the South, who love idleness and the freedom of a vagrant life. That lighthouse keeper is almost a prisoner. He cannot leave his rocky island except on Sundays. A boat from Aspinwall brings him provisions and water once a day, and returns immediately; on the whole island, one acre in area, there is no inhabitant. The keeper lives in the lighthouse; he keeps it in order. During the day he gives signals by displaying flags of various colors to indicate changes of the barometer; in the evening he lights the lantern. This would be no great labor were it not that to reach the lantern at the summit of the tower he must pass over more than four hundred steep and very high steps; sometimes he must make this journey repeatedly during the day. In general, it is the life of a monk, and indeed more than that — the life of a hermit. It was not wonderful, therefore, that Mr. Isaac Falconbridge was in no small anxiety as to where he should find a permanent successor to the recent keeper; and it is easy to understand his joy when a successor announced himself most unexpectedly on that very day. He was a man already old, seventy years or more, but fresh, erect, with the movements and bearing of a soldier. His hair was perfectly white, his face as dark as that of a Creole; but, judging from his blue eyes, he did not belong to a people of the South. His face was somewhat downcast and sad, but honest. At the first glance he pleased Falconbridge. It remained only to examine him. Therefore the following conversation began:

"Where are you from?"

"I am a Pole."

"Where have you worked up to this time?"

"In one place and another."

"A lighthouse keeper should like to stay in one place."

"I need rest."

"Have you served? Have you testimonials of honorable government service?"

The old man drew from his bosom a piece of faded silk resembling a strip of an old flag, unwound it, and said:

"Here are the testimonials. I received this cross in 1830. This second one is Spanish from the Carlist War; the third is the French legion; the fourth I received in Hungary. Afterward I fought in the States against the South; there they do not give crosses."

Falconbridge took the paper and began to read.

"H'm! Skavinski? Is that your name? H'm! Two flags captured in a bayonet attack. You were a gallant soldier."

"I am able to be a conscientious lighthouse keeper."

"It is necessary to ascend the tower a number of times daily. Have you sound legs?"

"I crossed the plains on foot." (The immense steppes between the East and California are called "the plains.")

"Do you know sea service?"

"I served three years on a whaler."

"You have tried various occupations."

"The only one I have not known is quiet."

"Why is that?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Such is my fate."

"Still you seem to me too old for a lighthouse keeper."

"Sir," exclaimed the candidate suddenly in a voice of emotion, "I am greatly wearied, knocked about. I have passed through much as you see. This place is one of those which I have wished for most ardently. I am old, I need rest. I need to say to myself, 'Here you will remain; this is your port.' Ah, sir, this depends now on you alone. Another time perhaps such a place will not offer itself. What luck that I was in Panama! I entreat you — as God is dear to me, I am like a ship which if it misses the harbor will be lost. If you wish to make an old man happy — I swear to you that I am honest, but — I have enough of wandering."

The blue eyes of the old man expressed such earnest entreaty that Falconbridge, who had a good, simple heart, was touched.

"Well," said he, "I take you. You are lighthouse keeper."

The old man's face gleamed with inexpressible joy.

"I thank you."

"Can you go to the tower today?"

"I can."

"Then goodbye. Another word: for any failure in service you will be dismissed."

"All right."

That same evening, when the sun had descended on the other side of the isthmus, and a day of sunshine was followed by a night without twilight, the new keeper was in his place evidently, for the lighthouse was casting its bright rays on the water as usual. The night was perfectly calm, silent, genuinely tropical, filled with a transparent haze, forming around the moon a great colored rainbow with soft, unbroken edges; the sea was moving only because the tide raised it. Skavinski on the balcony seemed from below like a small black point. He tried to collect his thoughts and take in his new position; but his mind was too much under pressure to move with regularity. He felt somewhat as a hunted beast feels when at last it has found refuge from pursuit on

some inaccessible rock or in a cave. There had come to him, finally, an hour of quiet; the feeling of safety filled his soul with a certain unspeakable bliss. Now on that rock he can simply laugh at his previous wanderings, his misfortunes and failures. He was in truth like a ship whose masts, ropes, and sails had been broken and rent by a tempest, and cast from the clouds to the bottom of the sea — a ship on which the tempest had hurled waves and spat foam, but which still wound its way to the harbor. The pictures of that storm passed quickly through his mind as he compared it with the calm future now beginning. A part of his wonderful adventures he had related to Falconbridge; he had not mentioned, however, thousands of other incidents. It had been his misfortune that as often as he pitched his tent and fixed his fireplace to settle down permanently, some wind tore out the stakes of his tent, whirled away the fire, and bore him on toward destruction. Looking now from the balcony of the tower at the illuminated waves, he remembered everything through which he had passed. He had campaigned in the four parts of the world, and in wandering had tried almost every occupation. Labor-loving and honest, more than once had he earned money, and had always lost it in spite of every prevision and the utmost caution. He had been a gold-miner in Australia, a diamond-digger in Africa, a rifleman in public service in the East Indies. He established a ranch in California — the drought ruined him; he tried trading with wild tribes in the interior of Brazil — his raft was wrecked on the Amazon; he himself alone, weaponless, and nearly naked, wandered in the forest for many weeks living on wild fruits, exposed every moment to death from the jaws of wild beasts. He established a forge in Helena, Arkansas, and that was burned in a great fire which consumed the whole town. Next he fell into the hands of Indians in the Rocky Mountains, and only through a miracle was he saved by Canadian trappers. Then he served as a sailor on a vessel running between Bahia and Bordeaux, and as harpooner on a whaling-ship; both vessels were wrecked. He had a cigar factory in Havana, and was robbed by his partner while he himself was lying sick with the vomito. At last he came to Aspinwall, and there was to be the end of his failures — for what could reach him on that rocky island? Neither water nor fire nor men. But from men Skavinski had not suffered much; he had met good men oftener than bad ones.

But it seemed to him that all the four elements were persecuting him. Those who knew him said that he had no luck, and with that they explained everything. He himself became somewhat of a monomaniac. He believed that some mighty and vengeful hand was pursuing him everywhere, on all lands and waters. He did not like, however, to speak of this; only at times, when some one asked him whose hand

that could be, he pointed mysteriously to the Polar Star, and said, "It comes from that place." In reality his failures were so continuous that they were wonderful, and might easily drive a nail into the head, especially of the man who had experienced them. But Skavinski had the patience of an Indian, and that great calm power of resistance which comes from truth of heart. In his time he had received in Hungary a number of bayonet-thrusts because he would not grasp at a stirrup which was shown as means of salvation to him, and cry for quarter. In like manner he did not bend to misfortune. He crept up against the mountain as industriously as an ant. Pushed down a hundred times, he began his journey calmly for the hundred and first time. He was in his way a most peculiar original. This old soldier, tempered, God knows in how many fires, hardened in suffering, hammered and forged, had the heart of a child. In the time of the epidemic in Cuba, the vomito attacked him because he had given to the sick all his quinine, of which he had a considerable supply, and left not a grain to himself.

There had been in him also this wonderful quality — that after so many disappointments he was ever full of confidence, and did not lose hope that all would be well yet. In winter he grew lively, and predicted great events. He waited for these events with impatience, and lived with the thought of them whole summers. But the winters passed one after another, and Skavinski lived only to this — that they whitened his head. At last he grew old, began to lose energy; his endurance was becoming more and more like resignation, his former calmness was tending toward supersensitiveness, and that tempered soldier was degenerating into a man ready to shed tears for any cause. Besides this, from time to time he was weighed down by a terrible homesickness which was roused by any circumstance — the sight of swallows, gray birds like sparrows, snow on the mountains, or melancholy music like that heard on a time. Finally, there was one idea which mastered him — the idea of rest. It mastered the old man thoroughly, and swallowed all other desires and hopes. This ceaseless wanderer could not imagine anything more to be longed for, anything more precious, than a quiet corner in which to rest, and wait in silence for the end. Perhaps specially because some whim of fate had so hurried him over all seas and lands that he could hardly catch his breath, did he imagine that the highest human happiness was simply not to wander. It is true that such modest happiness was his due; but he was so accustomed to disappointments that he thought of rest as people in general think of something which is beyond reach. He did not dare to hope for it. Meanwhile, unexpectedly, in the course of twelve hours he had gained a position which was as if chosen for him out of

all the world. We are not to wonder, then, that when he lighted his lantern in the evening he became as it were dazed — that he asked himself if that was reality, and he did not dare to answer that it was. But at the same time reality convinced him with incontrovertible proofs; hence hours one after another passed while he was on the balcony. He gazed, and convinced himself. It might seem that he was looking at the sea for the first time in his life. The lens of the lantern cast into the darkness an enormous triangle of light, beyond which the eye of the old man was lost in the black distance completely, in the distance mysterious and awful. But that distance seemed to run toward the light. The long waves following one another rolled out from the darkness, and went bellowing toward the base of the island; and then their foaming backs were visible, shining rose-colored in the light of the lantern. The incoming tide swelled more and more, and covered the sandy bars. The mysterious speech of the ocean came with a fulness more powerful and louder, at one time like the thunder of cannon, at another like the roar of great forests, at another like the distant dull sound of the voices of people. At moments it was quiet; then to the ears of the old man came some great sigh, then a kind of sobbing, and again threatening outbursts. At last the wind bore away the haze, but brought black, broken clouds, which hid the moon. From the west it began to blow more and more; the waves sprang with rage against the rock of the lighthouse, licking with foam the foundation walls. In the distance a storm was beginning to bellow. On the dark, disturbed expanse certain green lanterns gleamed from the masts of ships. These green points rose high and then sank; now they swayed to the right, and now to the left. Skavinski descended to his room. The storm began to howl. Outside, people on those ships were struggling with night, with darkness, with waves; but inside the tower it was calm and still. Even the sounds of the storm hardly came through the thick walls, and only the measured tick-tack of the clock lulled the wearied old man to his slumber.

II

Hours, days, and weeks began to pass. Sailors assert that sometimes when the sea is greatly roused, something from out the midst of night and darkness calls them by name. If the infinity of the sea may call out thus, perhaps when a man is growing old, calls come to him, too, from another infinity still darker and more deeply mysterious; and the more he is wearied by life the dearer are those calls to him. But to hear them quiet is needed. Besides old age loves to put itself aside as if with a foreboding of the grave. The lighthouse had become for Skavinski such a half grave. Nothing is more monotonous than life on a beacon-tower. If young people consent to take up this service they leave it

after a time. Lighthouse keepers are generally men not young, gloomy, and confined to themselves. If by chance one of them leaves his lighthouse and goes among men, he walks in the midst of them like a person roused from deep slumber. On the tower there is a lack of minute impressions which in ordinary life teach men to adapt themselves to everything. All that a lighthouse keeper comes in contact with is gigantic, and devoid of definitely outlined forms. The sky is one whole, the water another; and between those two infinities the soul of man is in loneliness. That is a life in which thought is continual meditation, and out of that meditation nothing rouses the keeper, not even his work. Day is like day as two beads in a rosary, unless changes of weather form the only variety. But Skavinski felt more happiness than ever in life before. He rose with the dawn, took his breakfast, polished the lens, and then sitting on the balcony gazed into the distance of the water; and his eyes were never sated with the pictures which he saw before him. On the enormous turquoise ground of the ocean were to be seen generally flocks of swollen sails gleaming in the rays of the sun so brightly that the eyes were blinking before the excess of light. Sometimes the ships, favored by the so-called trade winds, went in an extended line one after another, like a chain of sea-mews or albatrosses. The red casks indicating the channel swayed on the light wave with gentle movement. Among the sails appeared every afternoon gigantic grayish feather-like plumes of smoke. That was a steamer from New York which brought passengers and goods to Aspinwall, drawing behind it a frothy path of foam. On the other side of the balcony Skavinski saw, as if on his palm, Aspinwall and its busy harbor, and in it a forest of masts, boats, and craft; a little farther, white houses and the towers of the town. From the height of his tower the small houses were like the nests of sea-mews, the boats were like beetles, and the people moved around like small points on the white stone boulevard. From early morning a light eastern breeze brought a confused hum of human life, above which predominated the whistle of steamers. In the afternoon six o'clock came; the movement in the harbor began to cease; the mews hid themselves in the rents of the cliffs; the waves grew feeble and became in some sort lazy; and then on the land, on the sea, and on the tower came a time of stillness unbroken by anything. The yellow sands from which the waves had fallen back glittered like golden stripes on the width of the waters; the body of the tower was outlined definitely in blue. Floods of sunbeams were poured from the sky on the water and the sands and the cliff. At that time a certain lassitude full of sweetness seized the old man. He felt that the rest which he was enjoying was excellent; and when he thought that it would be continuous nothing was lacking to him.

Skavinski was intoxicated with his own happiness; and since a man adapts himself easily to improved conditions, he gained faith and confidence by degrees; for he thought that if men built houses for invalids, why should not God gather up at last His own invalids? Time passed, and confirmed him in this conviction. The old man grew accustomed to his tower, to the lantern, to the rock, to the sandbars, to solitude. He grew accustomed also to the sea-mews which hatched in the crevices of the rock, and in the evening held meetings on the roof of the lighthouse. Skavinski threw to them generally the remnants of his food; and soon they grew tame, and afterward, when he fed them, a real storm of white wings encircled him, and the old man went among the birds like a shepherd among sheep. When the tide ebbed he went to the low sandbanks, on which he collected savory periwinkles and beautiful pearl shells of the nautilus, which receding waves had left on the sand. In the night by the moonlight and the tower he went to catch fish, which frequented the windings of the cliff in myriads. At last he was in love with his rocks and his treeless little island, grown over only with small thick plants exuding sticky resin. The distant views repaid him for the poverty of the island, however. During afternoon hours, when the air became very clear he could see the whole isthmus covered with the richest vegetation. It seemed to Skavinski at such times that he saw one gigantic garden — bunches of cocoa, and enormous musa, combined as it were in luxurious tufted bouquets, right there behind the houses of Aspinwall. Farther on, between Aspinwall and Panama, was a great forest over which every morning and evening hung a reddish haze of exhalations — a real tropical forest with its feet in stagnant water, interlaced with lianas and filled with the sound of one sea of gigantic orchids, palms, milk-trees, iron-trees, gum-trees.

Through his field-glass the old man could see not only trees and the broad leaves of bananas, but even legions of monkeys and great marabous and flocks of parrots, rising at times like a rainbow cloud over the forest. Skavinski knew such forests well, for after being wrecked on the Amazon he had wandered whole weeks among similar arches and thickets. He had seen how many dangers and deaths lie concealed under those wonderful and smiling exteriors. During the nights which he had spent in them he heard close at hand the sepulchral voices of howling monkeys and the roaring of the jaguars; he saw gigantic serpents coiled like lianas on trees; he knew those slumbering forest lakes full of torpedo-fish and swarming with crocodiles; he knew under what a yoke man lives in those unexplored wildernesses in which are single leaves that exceed a man's size ten times — wildernesses swarming with blood-drinking mosquitoes, tree-

leeches, and gigantic poisonous spiders. He had experienced that forest life himself, had witnessed it, had passed through it; therefore it gave him the greater enjoyment to look from his height and gaze on those matos, admire their beauty, and be guarded from their treacherousness. His tower preserved him from every evil. He left it only for a few hours on Sunday. He put on then his blue keeper's coat with silver buttons, and hung his crosses on his breast. His milk-white head was raised with a certain pride when he heard at the door, while entering the church, the Creoles say among themselves, "We have an honorable lighthouse keeper and not a heretic, though he is a Yankee." But he returned straightway after Mass to his island, and returned happy, for he had still no faith in the mainland. On Sunday also he read the Spanish newspaper which he brought in the town, or the New York Herald, which he borrowed from Falconbridge; and he sought in it European news eagerly. The poor old heart on that lighthouse tower, and in another hemisphere, was beating yet for its birthplace. At times too, when the boat brought his daily supplies and water to the island, he went down from the tower to talk with Johnson, the guard. But after a while he seemed to grow shy. He ceased to go to the town to read the papers and to go down to talk politics with Johnson. Whole weeks passed in this way, so that no one saw him and he saw no one. The only signs that the old man was living were the disappearance of the provisions left on shore, and the light of the lantern kindled every evening with the same regularity with which the sun rose in the morning from the waters of those regions. Evidently, the old man had become indifferent to the world. Homesickness was not the cause, but just this — that even homesickness had passed into resignation. The whole world began now and ended for Skavinski on his island. He had grown accustomed to the thought that he would not leave the tower till his death, and he simply forgot that there was anything else besides it. Moreover, he had become a mystic; his mild blue eyes began to stare like the eyes of a child, and were as if fixed on something at a distance. In presence of a surrounding uncommonly simple and great, the old man was losing the feeling of personality; he was ceasing to exist as an individual, was becoming merged more and more in that which inclosed him. He did not understand anything beyond his environment; he felt only unconsciously. At last it seems to him that the heavens, the water, his rock, the tower, the golden sandbanks, and the swollen sails, the sea-mews, the ebb and flow of the tide — all form a mighty unity, one enormous mysterious soul; that he is sinking in that mystery, and feels that soul which lives and lulls itself. He sinks and is rocked, forgets himself; and in that narrowing of his own individual existence, in that half-waking, half-sleeping, he has discovered a rest so great that it nearly resembles half-death.

III

But the awakening came.

On a certain day, when the boat brought water and a supply of provisions, Skavinski came down an hour later from the tower, and saw that besides the usual cargo there was an additional package. On the outside of this package were postage stamps of the United States, and the address: "Skavinski, Esq.," written on coarse canvas.

The old man, with aroused curiosity, cut the canvas, and saw books; he took one in his hand, looked at it, and put it back; thereupon his hands began to tremble greatly. He covered his eyes as if he did not believe them; it seemed to him as if he were dreaming. The book was Polish — what did that mean? Who could have sent the book? Clearly, it did not occur to him at the first moment that in the beginning of his lighthouse career he had read in the Herald, borrowed from the consul, of the formation of a Polish society in New York, and had sent at once to that society half his month's salary, for which he had, moreover, no use on the tower. The society had sent him the books with thanks. The books came in the natural way; but at the first moment the old man could not seize those thoughts. Polish books in Aspinwall, on his tower, amid his solitude — that was for him something uncommon, a certain breath from past times, a kind of miracle. Now it seemed to him, as to those sailors in the night, that something was calling him by name with a voice greatly beloved and nearly forgotten. He sat for a while with closed eyes, and was almost certain that, when he opened them, the dream would be gone.

The package, cut open, lay before him, shone upon clearly by the afternoon sun, and on it was an open book. When the old man stretched his hand toward it again, he heard in the stillness the beating of his own heart. He looked; it was poetry. On the outside stood printed in great letters the title, underneath the name of the author. The name was not strange to Skavinski; he saw that it belonged to the great poet, whose productions he had read in 1830 in Paris. Afterward, when campaigning in Algiers and Spain, he had heard from his countrymen of the growing fame of the great seer; but he was so accustomed to the musket at that time that he took no book in hand. In 1849 he went to America, and in the adventurous life which he led he hardly ever met a Pole, and never a Polish book. With the greater eagerness, therefore, and with a livelier beating of the heart, did he turn to the title-page. It seemed to him then that on his lonely rock some solemnity is about to take place. Indeed it was a moment of great calm and silence.

The clocks of Aspinwall were striking five in the afternoon. Not a cloud darkened the clear sky; only a few sea-mews were sailing through the air. The ocean was as if cradled to sleep. The waves on the shore stammered quietly, spreading softly on the sand. In the distance the white houses of Aspinwall, and the wonderful groups of palm, were smiling. In truth, there was something there solemn, calm, and full of dignity. Suddenly, in the midst of that calm of Nature, was heard the trembling voice of the old man, who read aloud as if to understand himself better:

Thou art like health, O my birth-land Litva!
How much we should prize thee he only can know who has lost thee.
Thy beauty in perfect adornment this day
I see and describe, because I am yearning for thee.

His voice failed Skavinski. The letters began to dance before his eyes; something broke in his breast, and went like a wave from his heart higher and higher, choking his voice and pressing his throat. A moment more he controlled himself, and read further:

O Holy Lady, who guardest bright Chenstohova,
Who shinest in Ostrobrama and preservest
The castle town Novgrodek with its trusty people,
As Thou didst give me back to health in childhood,
When by my weeping mother placed beneath Thy care
I raised my lifeless eyelids upward,
And straightway walked unto Thy holy threshold,
To thank God for the life restored me —
So by a wonder now restore us to the bosom of our birthplace.

The swollen wave broke through the restraint of his will. The old man sobbed, and threw himself on the ground; his milk-white hair was mingled with the sand of the sea. Forty years had passed since he had seen his country, and God knows how many since he heard his native speech; and now that speech had come to him itself — it had sailed to him over the ocean, and found him in solitude on another hemisphere — it so loved, so dear, so beautiful! In the sobbing which shook him there was no pain — only a suddenly aroused immense love, in the presence of which other things are as nothing. With that great weeping he had simply implored forgiveness of that beloved one, set aside because he had grown so old, had become so accustomed to his solitary rock, and had so forgotten it that in him even longing had begun to disappear. But now it returned as if by a miracle; therefore the heart leaped in him.

Moments vanished one after another; he lay there continually. The mews flew over the lighthouse, crying as if alarmed for their old friend. The hour in which he fed them with the remnants of his food had come; therefore, some of them flew down from the lighthouse to him; then more and more came, and began to pick and to shake their wings over his head. The sound of the wings roused him. He had wept his fill, and had now a certain calm and brightness; but his eyes were as if inspired. He gave unwittingly all his provisions to the birds, which rushed at him with an uproar, and he himself took the book again. The sun had gone already behind the gardens and the forest of Panama, and was going slowly beyond the isthmus to the other ocean; but the Atlantic was full of light yet; in the open air there was still perfect vision; therefore, he read further:

"Now bear my longing soul to those forest slopes, to those green meadows."

At last the dusk obliterates the letters on the white paper — the dusk short as a twinkle. The old man rested his head on the rock, and closed his eyes. Then "She who defends bright Chenstohova" took his soul, and transported it to "those fields colored by various grain." On the sky were burning yet those long stripes, red and golden, and on those brightnesses he was flying to beloved regions. The pine-woods were sounding in his ears; the streams of his native place were murmuring. He saw everything as it was; everything asked him, "Dost remember?" He remembers! he sees broad fields; between the fields, woods and villages. It is night now. At this hour his lantern usually illuminates the darkness of the sea; but now he is in his native village. His old head has dropped on his breast, and he is dreaming. Pictures are passing before his eyes quickly, and a little disorderly. He does not see the house in which he was born, for war had destroyed it; he does not see his father and mother, for they died when he was a child; but still the village is as if he had left it yesterday — the line of cottages with lights in the windows, the mound, the mill, the two ponds opposite each other, and thundering all night with a chorus of frogs. Once he had been on guard in that village all night; now that past stood before him at once in a series of views. He is an Ulan again, and he stands there on guard; at a distance is the public-house; he looks with swimming eyes. There is thundering and singing and shouting amid the silence of the night with voices of fiddles and bass-viol "U-ha! U-ha!" Then the Ulans knock out fire with their horseshoes, and it is wearisome for him there on his horse. The hours drag on slowly; at last the lights are quenched; now as far as the eye reaches there is mist,

and mist impenetrable; now the fog rises, evidently from the fields, and embraces the whole world with a whitish cloud. You would say, a complete ocean. But that is fields; soon the land-rail will be heard in the darkness, and the bitterns will call from the reeds. The night is calm and cool — in truth, a Polish night! In the distance the pine-wood is sounding without wind, like the roll of the sea. Soon dawn will whiten the East. In fact, the cocks are beginning to crow behind the hedges. One answers to another from cottage to cottage; the storks are screaming somewhere on high. The Ulan feels well and bright. Some one had spoken of a battle to-morrow. Hei! that will go on, like all the others, with shouting, with fluttering of flaglets. The young blood is playing like a trumpet, though the night cools it. But it is dawning. Already night is growing pale; out of the shadows come forests, the thicket, a row of cottages, the mill, the poplars. The well is squeaking like a metal banner on a tower. What a beloved land, beautiful in the rosy gleams of the morning! Oh, the one land, the one land!

Quiet! the watchful picket hears that some one is approaching. Of course, they are coming to relieve the guard.

Suddenly some voice is heard above Skavinski —

"Here, old man! Get up! What's the matter?"

The old man opens his eyes, and looks with wonder at the person standing before him. The remnants of the dream-visions struggle in his head with reality. At last the visions pale and vanish. Before him stands Johnson, the harbor guide.

"What's this?" asked Johnson; "are you sick?"

"No."

"You didn't light the lantern. You must leave your place. A vessel from St. Geromo was wrecked on the bar. It is lucky that no one was drowned, or you would go to trial. Get into the boat with me; you'll hear the rest at the Consulate."

The old man grew pale; in fact he had not lighted the lantern that night.

A few days later, Skavinski was seen on the deck of a steamer, which was going from Aspinwall to New York. The poor man had lost his place. There opened before him new roads of wandering; the wind had torn that leaf away again to whirl it over lands and seas, to sport with it

till satisfied. The old man had failed greatly during those few days, and was bent over; only his eyes were gleaming. On his new road of life he held at his breast his book, which from time to time he pressed with his hand as if in fear that that too might go from him.

The Bet

By Anton Chekhov. (1860-1904)

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker was walking up and down his study and remembering how, fifteen years before, he had given a party one autumn evening. There had been many clever men there, and there had been interesting conversations. Among other things they had talked of capital punishment. The majority of the guests, among whom were many journalists and intellectual men, disapproved of the death penalty. They considered that form of punishment out of date, immoral, and unsuitable for Christian States. In the opinion of some of them the death penalty ought to be replaced everywhere by imprisonment for life. "I don't agree with you," said their host the banker. "I have not tried either the death penalty or imprisonment for life, but if one may judge a priori, the death penalty is more moral and more humane than imprisonment for life. Capital punishment kills a man at once, but lifelong imprisonment kills him slowly. Which executioner is the more humane, he who kills you in a few minutes or he who drags the life out of you in the course of many years?"

"Both are equally immoral," observed one of the guests, "for they both have the same object - to take away life. The State is not God. It has not the right to take away what it cannot restore when it wants to."

Among the guests was a young lawyer, a young man of five-and-twenty. When he was asked his opinion, he said:

"The death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral, but if I had to choose between the death penalty and imprisonment for life, I would certainly choose the second. To live anyhow is better than not at all."

A lively discussion arose. The banker, who was younger and more nervous in those days, was suddenly carried away by excitement; he struck the table with his fist and shouted at the young man:

"It's not true! I'll bet you two million you wouldn't stay in solitary confinement for five years."

"If you mean that in earnest," said the young man, "I'll take the bet, but I would stay not five but fifteen years."

"Fifteen? Done!" cried the banker. "Gentlemen, I stake two million!"

"Agreed! You stake your millions and I stake my freedom!" said the young man.

And this wild, senseless bet was carried out! The banker, spoilt and frivolous, with millions beyond his reckoning, was delighted at the bet. At supper he made fun of the young man, and said:

"Think better of it, young man, while there is still time. To me two million is a trifle, but you are losing three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you won't stay longer. Don't forget either, you unhappy man, that voluntary confinement is a great deal harder to bear than compulsory. The thought that you have the right to step out in liberty at any moment will poison your whole existence in prison. I am sorry for you."

And now the banker, walking to and fro, remembered all this, and asked himself: "What was the object of that bet? What is the good of that man's losing fifteen years of his life and my throwing away two million? Can it prove that the death penalty is better or worse than imprisonment for life? No, no. It was all nonsensical and meaningless. On my part it was the caprice of a pampered man, and on his part simple greed for money ..."

Then he remembered what followed that evening. It was decided that the young man should spend the years of his captivity under the strictest supervision in one of the lodges in the banker's garden. It was agreed that for fifteen years he should not be free to cross the threshold of the lodge, to see human beings, to hear the human voice, or to receive letters and newspapers. He was allowed to have a musical instrument and books, and was allowed to write letters, to drink wine, and to smoke. By the terms of the agreement, the only relations he could have with the outer world were by a little window made purposely for that object. He might have anything he wanted - books, music, wine, and so on - in any quantity he desired by writing an order, but could only receive them through the window. The agreement provided for every detail and every trifle that would make his imprisonment strictly solitary, and bound the young man to stay there exactly fifteen years, beginning from twelve o'clock of November

14, 1870, and ending at twelve o'clock of November 14, 1885. The slightest attempt on his part to break the conditions, if only two minutes before the end, released the banker from the obligation to pay him the two million.

For the first year of his confinement, as far as one could judge from his brief notes, the prisoner suffered severely from loneliness and depression. The sounds of the piano could be heard continually day and night from his lodge. He refused wine and tobacco. Wine, he wrote, excites the desires, and desires are the worst foes of the prisoner; and besides, nothing could be more dreary than drinking good wine and seeing no one. And tobacco spoilt the air of his room. In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character; novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on.

In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. He did not read books. Sometimes at night he would sit down to write; he would spend hours writing, and in the morning tear up all that he had written. More than once he could be heard crying.

In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies - so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered. In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request. It was during this period that the banker received the following letter from his prisoner:

"My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!" The prisoner's desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two shots to be fired in the garden.

Then after the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospel. It seemed strange to the banker that a

man who in four years had mastered six hundred learned volumes should waste nearly a year over one thin book easy of comprehension. Theology and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books quite indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences, then he would ask for Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry, and a manual of medicine, and a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another.

II

The old banker remembered all this, and thought:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock he will regain his freedom. By our agreement I ought to pay him two million. If I do pay him, it is all over with me: I shall be utterly ruined."

Fifteen years before, his millions had been beyond his reckoning; now he was afraid to ask himself which were greater, his debts or his assets. Desperate gambling on the Stock Exchange, wild speculation and the excitability which he could not get over even in advancing years, had by degrees led to the decline of his fortune and the proud, fearless, self-confident millionaire had become a banker of middling rank, trembling at every rise and fall in his investments. "Cursed bet!" muttered the old man, clutching his head in despair "Why didn't the man die? He is only forty now. He will take my last penny from me, he will marry, will enjoy life, will gamble on the Exchange; while I shall look at him with envy like a beggar, and hear from him every day the same sentence: 'I am indebted to you for the happiness of my life, let me help you!' No, it is too much! The one means of being saved from bankruptcy and disgrace is the death of that man!"

It struck three o'clock, the banker listened; everyone was asleep in the house and nothing could be heard outside but the rustling of the chilled trees. Trying to make no noise, he took from a fireproof safe the key of the door which had not been opened for fifteen years, put on his overcoat, and went out of the house.

It was dark and cold in the garden. Rain was falling. A damp cutting wind was racing about the garden, howling and giving the trees no

rest. The banker strained his eyes, but could see neither the earth nor the white statues, nor the lodge, nor the trees. Going to the spot where the lodge stood, he twice called the watchman. No answer followed. Evidently the watchman had sought shelter from the weather, and was now asleep somewhere either in the kitchen or in the greenhouse.

"If I had the pluck to carry out my intention," thought the old man, "Suspicion would fall first upon the watchman."

He felt in the darkness for the steps and the door, and went into the entry of the lodge. Then he groped his way into a little passage and lighted a match. There was not a soul there. There was a bedstead with no bedding on it, and in the corner there was a dark cast-iron stove. The seals on the door leading to the prisoner's rooms were intact.

When the match went out the old man, trembling with emotion, peeped through the little window. A candle was burning dimly in the prisoner's room. He was sitting at the table. Nothing could be seen but his back, the hair on his head, and his hands. Open books were lying on the table, on the two easy-chairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner did not once stir. Fifteen years' imprisonment had taught him to sit still. The banker tapped at the window with his finger, and the prisoner made no movement whatever in response. Then the banker cautiously broke the seals off the door and put the key in the keyhole. The rusty lock gave a grating sound and the door creaked. The banker expected to hear at once footsteps and a cry of astonishment, but three minutes passed and it was as quiet as ever in the room. He made up his mind to go in.

At the table a man unlike ordinary people was sitting motionless. He was a skeleton with the skin drawn tight over his bones, with long curls like a woman's and a shaggy beard. His face was yellow with an earthy tint in it, his cheeks were hollow, his back long and narrow, and the hand on which his shaggy head was propped was so thin and delicate that it was dreadful to look at it. His hair was already streaked with silver, and seeing his emaciated, aged-looking face, no one would have believed that he was only forty. He was asleep ... In front of his bowed head there lay on the table a sheet of paper on which there was something written in fine handwriting.

"Poor creature!" thought the banker, "he is asleep and most likely dreaming of the millions. And I have only to take this half-dead man,

throw him on the bed, stifle him a little with the pillow, and the most conscientious expert would find no sign of a violent death. But let us first read what he has written here ... "

The banker took the page from the table and read as follows:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock I regain my freedom and the right to associate with other men, but before I leave this room and see the sunshine, I think it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.

"For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forests, have loved women ... Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen the sun rise and have watched it at evening flood the sky, the ocean, and the mountain-tops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the storm-clouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains of the shepherds' pipes; I have touched the wings of comely devils who flew down to converse with me of God ... In your books I have flung myself into the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms ...

"Your books have given me wisdom. All that the unresting thought of man has created in the ages is compressed into a small compass in my brain. I know that I am wiser than all of you.

"And I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage. You may be proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the face of the earth as though you were no more than mice burrowing under the floor, and your posterity, your history, your immortal geniuses will burn or freeze together with the earthly globe.

"You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path. You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness for beauty. You would marvel if, owing

to strange events of some sorts, frogs and lizards suddenly grew on apple and orange trees instead of fruit, or if roses began to smell like a sweating horse; so I marvel at you who exchange heaven for earth. I don't want to understand you.

"To prove to you in action how I despise all that you live by, I renounce the two million of which I once dreamed as of paradise and which now I despise. To deprive myself of the right to the money I shall go out from here five hours before the time fixed, and so break the compact ..."

When the banker had read this he laid the page on the table, kissed the strange man on the head, and went out of the lodge, weeping. At no other time, even when he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange, had he felt so great a contempt for himself. When he got home he lay on his bed, but his tears and emotion kept him for hours from sleeping.

Next morning the watchmen ran in with pale faces, and told him they had seen the man who lived in the lodge climb out of the window into the garden, go to the gate, and disappear. The banker went at once with the servants to the lodge and made sure of the flight of his prisoner. To avoid arousing unnecessary talk, he took from the table the writing in which the millions were renounced, and when he got home locked it up in the fireproof safe.

The Tall Woman

By Pedro Antonio de Alarcon. (1833-1891)

"How little we really know, my friends; how little we really know." The speaker was Gabriel, a distinguished civil engineer of the mountain corps. He was seated under a pine tree, near a spring, on the crest of the Guadarrama. It was only about a league and a half distant from the palace of the Escorial, on the boundary line of the provinces of Madrid and Segovia. I know the place, spring, pine tree and all, but I have forgotten its name.

"Let us sit down," went on Gabriel, "as that is the correct thing to do, and as our programme calls for a rest here--here in this pleasant and classic spot, famous for the digestive properties of that spring, and for the many lambs here devoured by our noted teachers, Don Miguel Bosch, Don Maximo Laguna, Don Augustin Pascual, and other illustrious naturalists. Sit down, and I will tell you a strange and

wonderful story in proof of my thesis, which is, though you call me an obscurantist for it, that supernatural events still occur on this terraqueous globe. I mean events which you cannot get into terms of reason, or science, or philosophy--as those 'words, words, words,' in Hamlet's phrase, are understood (or are not understood) to-day." Gabriel was addressing his animated remarks to five persons of different ages. None of them was young, though only one was well along in years. Three of them were, like Gabriel, engineers, the fourth was a painter, and the fifth was a litterateur in a small way. In company with the speaker, who was the youngest, we had all ridden up on hired mules from the Real Sitio de San Lorenzo to spend the day botanizing among the beautiful pine groves of Pequerinos, chasing butterflies with gauze nets, catching rare beetles under the bark of the decayed pines, and eating a cold lunch out of a hamper which we had paid for on shares.

This took place in 1875. It was the height of the summer. I do not remember whether it was Saint James's day or Saint Louis's; I am inclined to think it was Saint Louis's. Whichever it was, we enjoyed a delicious coolness at that height, and the heart and brain, as well as the stomach, were there in much better working order than usual. When the six friends were seated, Gabriel continued as follows: "I do not think you will accuse me of being a visionary. Luckily or unluckily, I am, if you will allow me to say so, a man of the modern world. I have no superstition about me, and am as much of a Positivist as the best of them, although I include among the positive data of nature all the mysterious faculties and feelings of the soul. Well, then, apropos of supernatural, or extra-natural, phenomena, listen to what I have seen and heard, although I was not the real hero of the very strange story I am going to relate, and then tell me what explanation of an earthly, physical, or natural sort, however you may name it, can be given of so wonderful an occurrence.

"The case was as follows. But wait! Pour me out a drop, for the skin-bottle must have got cooled off by this time in that bubbling, crystalline spring, located by Providence on this piny crest for the express purpose of cooling a botanist's wine."

II.

Well, gentlemen, I do not know whether you ever heard of an engineer of the roads corps named Telesforo X---; he died in 1860."

"No; I haven't."

"But I have."

"So have I. He was a young fellow from Andalusia, with a black moustache; he was to have married the Marquis of Moreda's daughter, but he died of jaundice."

"The very one," said Gabriel. "Well, then, my friend Telesforo, six

months before his death, was still a most promising young man, as they say nowadays. He was good-looking, well-built, energetic, and had the glory of being the first one in his class to be promoted. He had already gained distinction in the practice of his profession through some fine pieces of work. Several different companies were competing for his services, and many marriageable women were also competing for him. But Telesforo, as you said, was faithful to poor Joaquina Moreda.

"As you know, it turned out that she died suddenly at the baths of Santa Agueda, at the end of the summer of 1859. I was in Pau when I received the sad news of her death, which affected me very much on account of my close friendship with Telesforo. With her I had spoken only once, in the house of her aunt, the wife of General Lopez, and I certainly thought her bluish pallor a symptom of bad health. But, however that may be, she had a distinguished manner and a great deal of grace, and was, besides, the only daughter of a title, and a title that carried some comfortable thousands with it; so I felt sure my good mathematician would be inconsolable. Consequently, as soon as I was back in Madrid, fifteen or twenty days after his loss, I went to see them very early one morning. He lived in elegant bachelor quarters in Lobo Street--I do not remember the number, but it was near the Carrera de San Jeronimo.

"The young engineer was very melancholy, although calm and apparently master of his grief. He was already at work, even at that hour, laboring with his assistants over some railroad plans or other. He was dressed in deep mourning.

"He greeted me with a long and close embrace, without so much as sighing. Then he gave some directions to his assistants about the work in hand, and afterwards led me to his private office at the farther end of the house. As we were on our way there he said, in a sorrowful tone and without glancing at me:

"I am very glad you have come. Several times I have found myself wishing you were here. A very strange thing has happened to me. Only a friend such as you are can hear of it without thinking me either a fool or crazy. I want to get an opinion about it as calm and cool as science itself.

"'Sit down,' he went on when we had reached his office, 'and do not imagine that I am going to afflict you with a description of the sorrow I am suffering--a sorrow which will last as long as I live. Why should I? You can easily picture it to yourself, little as you know of trouble. And as for being comforted, I do not wish to be, either now, or later, or ever! What I am going to speak to you about, with the requisite deliberation, going back to the very beginning of the thing, is a horrible and mysterious occurrence, which was an infernal omen of my calamity,

and which has distressed me in a frightful manner.'

"Go on,' I replied, sitting down. The fact was, I almost repented having entered the house as I saw the expression of abject fear on my friend's face.

"Listen, then,' said he, wiping the perspiration from his forehead."

III.

"I DO not know whether it is due to some inborn fatality of imagination, or to having heard some story or other of the kind with which children are so rashly allowed to be frightened, but the fact is, that since my earliest years nothing has caused me so much horror and alarm as a woman alone, in the street, at a late hour of the night. The effect is the same whether I actually encounter her, or simply have an image of her in my mind.

"You can testify that I was never a coward. I fought a duel once, when I had to, like any other man. Just after I had left the School of Engineers, my workmen in Despenaperros revolted, and I fought them with stick and pistol until I made them submit. All my life long, in Jaen, in Madrid, and elsewhere, I have walked the streets at all hours, alone and unarmed, and if I have chanced to run upon suspicious-looking persons, thieves, or mere sneaking beggars, they have had to get out of my way or take to their heels. But if the person turned out to be a solitary woman, standing still or walking, and I was also alone, with no one in sight in any direction--then (laugh if you want to, but believe me) I would be all covered over with goose-flesh; vague fears would assail me; I would think about beings of the other world, about imaginary existences, and about all the superstitious stories which would make me laugh under other circumstances. I would quicken my pace, or else turn back, and would not get over my fright in the least until safe in my own house.

"Once there I would fall a-laughing, and would be ashamed of my crazy fears. The only comfort I had was that nobody knew anything about it. Then I would dispassionately remind myself that I did not believe in goblins, witches, or ghosts, and that I had no reason whatever to be afraid of that wretched woman driven from her home at such an hour by poverty, or some crime, or accident, to whom I might better have offered help, if she needed it, or given alms. Nevertheless, the pitiable scene would be gone over again as often as a similar thing occurred--and remember that I was twenty-four years old, that I had experienced a great many adventures by night, and yet that I had never had the slightest difficulty of any sort with such solitary women in the streets after midnight! But nothing of what I have so far told you ever came to have any importance, since that irrational fear always left me as soon as I reached home, or saw any one else in the street, and I would scarcely recall it a few minutes afterwards, any more than one

would recall a stupid mistake which had no result of any consequence. "Things were going on so, when, nearly three years ago (unhappily, I have good reason for knowing the date, it was the night of November 15-16, 1857), I was coming home at three in the morning. As you remember, I was living then in that little house in Jardines Street, near Montera Street. I had just come, at that late hour, a bitter, cold wind blowing at the time, out of a sort of a gambling-house--I tell you this, although I know it will surprise you. You know that I am not a gambler. I went into the place, deceived by an alleged friend. But the fact was, that as people began to drop in about midnight, coming from receptions or the theatre, the play began to be very heavy, and one saw the gleam of gold in plenty. Then came bank-bills and notes of hand. Little by little I was carried away by the feverish and seductive passion, and lost all the money I had. I even went away missing a second sum, for which I had left my note behind me. In short, I ruined myself completely; and but for the legacy that came to me afterwards, together with the good jobs I have had, my situation would have been extremely critical and painful.

"So I was going home, I say, at so late an hour that night, numb with the cold, hungry, ashamed, and disgusted as you can imagine, thinking about my sick old father more than about myself. I should have to write to him for money, and this would astonish as much as it would grieve him, since he thought me in very easy circumstances. Just before reaching my street, where it crosses Peligros Street, as I was walking in front of a newly-built house, I perceived something in its doorway. It was a tall, large woman, standing stiff and motionless, as if made of wood. She seemed to be about sixty years old. Her wild and malignant eyes, unshaded by eyelashes, were fixed on mine like two daggers. Her toothless mouth made a horrible grimace at me, meant to be a smile.

"The very terror or delirium of fear which instantly overcame me gave me somehow a most acute perception, so that I could distinguish at a glance, in the two seconds it took me to pass by that repugnant vision, the slightest details of her face and dress. Let me see if I can put together my impressions in the way and form in which I received them, as they were engraved ineffaceably on my brain in the light of the street-lamp which shone luridly over that ghastly scene. But I am exciting myself too much, though there is reason enough for it, as you will see further on. Don't be concerned, however, for the state of my mind. I am not yet crazy!

"The first thing which struck me in that WOMAN, as I will call her, was her extreme height and the breadth of her bony shoulders. Then, the roundness and fixity of her dry, owl-eyes, the enormous size of her protruding nose, and the great dark cavern of her mouth. Finally, her

dress, like that of a young woman of Avapies--the new little cotton handkerchief which she wore on her head, tied under her chin, and a diminutive fan which she carried open in her hand, and with which, in affected modesty, she was covering the middle of her waist.

"Nothing could be at the same time more ridiculous and more awful, more laughable and more taunting, than that little fan in those huge hands. It seemed like a make-believe sceptre in the hands of such an old, hideous, and bony giantess! A like effect was produced by the showy percale handkerchief adorning her face by the side of that cut-water nose, hooked and masculine; for a moment I was led to believe (or I was very glad to) that it was a man in disguise.

"But her cynical glance and harsh smile were of a hag, of a witch, an enchantress, a Fate, a--I know not what! There was something about her to justify fully the aversion and fright which I had been caused all my life long by women walking alone in the streets at night. One would have said that I had had a presentiment of that encounter from my cradle. One would have said that I was frightened by it instinctively, as every living being fears and divines, and scents and recognizes, its natural enemy before ever being injured by it, before ever having seen it, and solely on hearing its tread.

"I did not dash away in a run when I saw my life's sphinx. I restrained my impulse to do so, less out of shame and manly pride than out of fear lest my very fright should reveal to her who I was, or should give her wings to follow me, to overtake me--I do not know what. Panic like that dreams of dangers which have neither form nor name.

"My house was at the opposite end of the long and narrow street, in which I was alone, entirely alone with that mysterious phantom whom I thought able to annihilate me with a word. How should I ever get home? Oh, how anxiously I looked towards that distant Montera street, broad and well lighted, where there are policemen to be found at all hours! I decided, finally, to get the better of my weakness; to dissemble and hide that wretched fear; not to hasten my pace, but to keep on advancing slowly, even at the cost of years of health or life, and in this way, little by little, to go on getting nearer to my house, exerting myself to the utmost not to fall fainting on the ground before I reached it.

"I was walking along in this way--I must have taken about twenty steps after leaving behind me the doorway where the woman with the fan was hidden, when suddenly a horrible idea came to me--horrible, yet very natural nevertheless--the idea that I would look back to see if my enemy was following me. One thing or the other I thought, with the rapidity of a flash of lightning: either my alarm has some foundation or it is madness; if it has any foundation, this woman will have started after me, will be overtaking me, and there is no hope for me on earth. But if it is madness, a mere supposition, a panic fright like any other, I

will convince myself of it in the present instance, and for every case that may occur hereafter, by seeing that that poor old woman has stayed in that doorway to protect herself from the cold, or to wait till the door is opened; and thereupon I can go on to my house in perfect tranquillity, and I shall have cured myself of a fancy that causes me great mortification.

"This reasoning gone through with, I made an extraordinary effort and turned my head. Ah, Gabriel!--Gabriel! how fearful it was! The tall woman had followed me with silent tread, was right over me, almost touching me with her fan, almost leaning her head on my shoulder.

"Why was she doing it?--why, my Gabriel? Was she a thief? Was she really a man in disguise? Was she some malicious old hag who had seen that I was afraid of her? Was she a spectre conjured up by my very cowardice? Was she a mocking phantasm of human self-deception?

"I could never tell you all I thought in a single moment. If the truth must be told, I gave a scream and flew away like a child of four years who thinks he sees the Black Man. I did not stop running until I got out into Montera Street. Once there, my fear left me like magic. This in spite of the fact that that street also was deserted. Then I turned my head to look back to Jardines Street. I could see down its whole length. It was lighted well enough for me to see the tall woman, if she had drawn back in any direction, and, by Heaven! I could not see her, standing still, walking, or in any way! However, I was very careful not to go back into that street again. The wretch, I said to myself, has slunk into some other doorway. But she can't move without my seeing her.

"Just then I saw a policeman coming up Caballero de Gracia Street, and I shouted to him without stirring from my place. I told him that there was a man dressed as a woman in Jardines Street. I directed him to go round by the way of Peligros and Aduana Streets, while I would remain where I was, and in that way the fellow, who was probably a thief or murderer, could not escape us. The policeman did as I said. He went through Aduana Street, and as soon as I saw his lantern coming along Jardines Street I also went up it resolutely.

"We soon met at about the middle of the block, without either of us having encountered a soul, although we had examined door after door.

""He has got into some house," said the policeman.

""That must be so," I replied, opening my door with the fixed purpose of moving to some other street the next day.

"A few moments later I was in my room; I always carried my latchkey, so as not to have to disturb my good Jose. Nevertheless, he was waiting for me that night. My misfortunes of the 15th and 16th of November were not yet ended.

""What has happened?" I asked him, in surprise.

""Major Falcon was here," he replied, with evident agitation, "waiting for you from eleven till half-past two, and he told me that, if you came home to sleep, you had better not undress, as he would be back at daybreak."

""Those words left me trembling with grief and alarm, as if they had predicted my own death to me. I knew that my beloved father, at his home in Jean, had been suffering frequent and dangerous attacks of his chronic disease. I had written to my brothers that, if there should be a sudden and fatal termination of the sickness, they were to telegraph Major Falcon, who would inform me in some suitable way. I had not the slightest doubt, therefore, that my father had died."

""I sat down in an arm-chair to wait for the morning and my friend, and, with them, the news of my great misfortune. God only knows what I suffered in those two cruel hours of waiting. All the while, three distinct ideas were inseparably joined in my mind; though they seemed unlike, they took pains, as it were, to keep in a dreadful group. They were: my losses at play, my meeting with the tall woman, and the death of my revered father."

""Precisely at six Major Falcon came into my room, and looked at me in silence. I threw myself into his arms, weeping bitterly, and he exclaimed, caressing me:

""Yes, my dear fellow, weep, weep.""

IV.

"My friend Telesforo," Gabriel went on, after having drained another glass of wine, "also rested a moment when he reached this point, and then he proceeded as follows:

"If my story ended here, perhaps you would not find anything extraordinary or supernatural in it. You would say to me the same thing that men of good judgment said to me at that time: that every one who has a lively imagination is subject to some impulse of fear or other; that mine came from belated, solitary women, and that the old creature of Jardines Street was only some homeless waif who was going to beg of me when I screamed and ran."

"For my part, I tried to believe that it was so. I even came to believe it at the end of several months. Still, I would have given years of my life to be sure that I was not again to encounter the tall woman. But, to-day, I would give every drop of my blood to be able to meet her again."

"What for?"

"To kill her on the spot."

"I do not understand you."

"You will understand me when I tell you that I did meet her again, three weeks ago, a few hours before I had the fatal news of my poor Joaquina's death."

"Tell me about it, tell me about it!"

"There is little more to tell. It was five o'clock in the morning. It was not yet fully light, though the dawn was visible from the streets looking towards the east. The street-lamps had just been put out, and the policemen had withdrawn. As I was going through Prado Street, so as to get to the other end of Lobo Street, the dreadful woman crossed in front of me. She did not look at me, and I thought she had not seen me.

"She wore the same dress and carried the same fan as three years before. My trepidation and alarm were greater than ever. I ran rapidly across Prado Street as soon as she had passed, although I did not take my eyes off her, so as to make sure that she did not look back, and, when I had reached the other end of Lobo Street, I panted as if I had just swum an impetuous stream. Then I pressed on with fresh speed towards home, filled now with gladness rather than fear, for I thought that the hateful witch had been conquered and shorn of her power, from the very fact that I had been so near her and yet that she had not seen me.

"But soon, and when I had almost reached this house, a rush of fear swept over me, in the thought that the crafty old hag had seen and recognized me, that she had made a pretence of not knowing me so as to let me get into Lobo Street, where it was still rather dark, and where she might set upon me in safety, that she would follow me, that she was already over me.

"Upon this, I looked around--and there she was! There at my shoulder, almost touching me with her clothes, gazing at me with her horrible little eyes, displaying the gloomy cavern of her mouth, fanning herself in a mocking manner, as if to make fun of my childish alarm.

"I passed from dread to the most furious anger, to savage and desperate rage. I dashed at the heavy old creature. I flung her against the wall. I put my hand to her throat. I felt of her face, her breast, the straggling locks of her gray hair until I was thoroughly convinced that she was a human being--a woman.

"Meanwhile she had uttered a howl which was hoarse and piercing at the same time. It seemed false and feigned to me, like the hypocritical expression of a fear which she did not really feel. Immediately afterwards she exclaimed, making believe cry, though she was not crying, but looking at me with her hyena eyes:

""Why have you picked a quarrel with me?"

"This remark increased my fright and weakened my wrath.

""Then you remember," I cried, "that you have seen me somewhere else."

""I should say so, my dear," she replied, mockingly. "Saint Eugene's night, in Jardines Street, three years ago."

"My very marrow was chilled.

""But who are you?" I asked, without letting go of her. "Why do you follow me? What business have you with me?"

""I am a poor weak woman," she answered, with a devilish leer. "You hate me, and you are afraid of me without any reason. If not, tell me, good sir, why you were so frightened the first time you saw me."

""Because I have loathed you ever since I was born. Because you are the evil spirit of my life."

""It seems, then, that you have known me for a long time. Well, look, my son, so have I known you."

""You have known me? How long?"

""Since before you were born! And when I saw you pass by me, three years ago, I said to myself, THAT'S THE ONE."

""But what am I to you? What are you to me?"

""The devil!" replied the hag, spitting full in my face, freeing herself from my grasp, and running away with amazing swiftness. She held her skirts higher than her knees, and her feet did not make the slightest noise as they touched the ground.

""It was madness to try to catch her. Besides, people were already passing through the Carrera de San Jeronimo, and in Prado Street, too. It was broad daylight. The tall woman kept on running, or flying, as far as Huertas Street, which was now lighted up by the sun. There she stopped to look back at me. She waved her closed fan at me once or twice, threateningly, and then disappeared around a corner.

""Wait a little longer, Gabriel. Do not yet pronounce judgment in this case, where my life and soul are concerned. Listen to me two minutes longer.

""When I entered my house I met Colonel Falcon, who had just come to tell me that my Joaquina, my betrothed, all my hope and happiness and joy on earth, had died the day before in Santa Agueda. The unfortunate father had telegraphed Falcon to tell me--me, who should have divined it an hour before, when I met the evil spirit of my life! Don't you understand, now, that I must kill that born enemy of my happiness, that vile old hag, who is the living mockery of my destiny? "But why do I say kill? Is she a woman? Is she a human being? Why have I had a presentiment of her ever since I was born? Why did she recognize me when she first saw me? Why do I never see her except when some great calamity has befallen me? Is she Satan? Is she Death? Is she Life? Is she Antichrist? Who is she? What is she?"

V.

"I will spare you, my dear friends," continued Gabriel, "the arguments and remarks which I used to see if I could not calm Telesforo, for they are the same, precisely the same, which you are preparing now to advance to prove that there is nothing supernatural or superhuman in my story. You will even go further; you will say that my friend was half

crazy; that he always was so; that, at least, he suffered from that moral disease which some call 'panic terror,' and others 'emotional insanity'; that, even granting the truth of what I have related about the tall woman, it must all be referred to chance coincidences of dates and events; and, finally, that the poor old creature could also have been crazy, or a thief, or a beggar, or a procuress--as the hero of my story said to himself in a lucid interval."

"A very proper supposition," exclaimed Gabriel's comrades; "that is just what we were going to say."

"Well, listen a few minutes longer, and you will see that I was mistaken at the time, as you are mistaken now. The one who unfortunately made no mistake was Telesforo. It is much easier to speak the word 'insanity' than to find an explanation for some things that happen on the earth."

"Speak, speak!"

"I am going to; and this time, as it is the last, I will pick up the thread of my story without first drinking a glass of wine."

VI.

"A few days after that conversation with Telesforo I was sent to the province of Albacete in my capacity as engineer of the mountain corps. Not many weeks had passed before I learned, from a contractor for public works, that my unhappy friend had been attacked by a dreadful form of jaundice; it had turned him entirely green, and he reclined in an arm-chair without working or wishing to see anybody, weeping night and day in the most inconsolable and bitter grief. The doctors had given up hope of his getting well.

"This made me understand why he had not answered my letters. I had to resort to Colonel Falcon as a source of news of him, and all the while the reports kept getting more unfavorable and gloomy.

"After an absence of five months I returned to Madrid the same day that the telegraph brought the news of the battle of Tetuan. I remember it as if it were yesterday. That night I bought the indispensable Correspondencia de Espana, and the first thing I read in it was the notice of Telesforo's death. His friends were invited to the funeral the following morning.

"You will be sure that I was present. As we arrived at the San Luis cemetery, whither I rode in one of the carriages nearest the hearse, my attention was called to a peasant woman. She was old and very tall. She was laughing sacrilegiously as she saw them taking out the coffin. Then she placed herself in front of the pall-bearers in a triumphant attitude and pointed out to them with a very small fan the passage-way they were to take to reach the open and waiting grave.

"At the first glance I perceived, with amazement and alarm, that she was Telesforo's implacable enemy. She was just as he had described

her to me--with her enormous nose, her devilish eyes, her awful mouth, her percale handkerchief, and that diminutive fan which seemed in her hands the sceptre of indecency and mockery.

"She immediately observed that I was looking at her, and fixed her gaze upon me in a peculiar manner, as if recognizing me, as if letting me know that she recognized me, as if acquainted with the fact that the dead man had told me about the scenes in Jardines Street and Lobo Street, as if defying me, as if declaring me the inheritor of the hate which she had cherished for my unfortunate friend.

"I confess that at the time my fright was greater than my wonder at those new COINCIDENCES and ACCIDENTS. It seemed evident to me that some supernatural relation, antecedent to earthly life, had existed between the mysterious old woman and Telesforo. But for the time being my sole concern was about my own life, my own soul, my own happiness--all of which would be exposed to the greatest peril if I should really inherit such a curse.

"The tall woman began to laugh. She pointed at me contemptuously with the fan, as if she had read my thoughts and were publicly exposing my cowardice. I had to lean on a friend's arm to keep myself from falling. Then she made a pitying or disdainful gesture, turned on her heels, and went into the cemetery. Her head was turned towards me. She fanned herself and nodded to me at the same time. She sidled along among the graves with an indescribable, infernal coquetry, until at last she disappeared for ever in that labyrinth of tombs.

"I say for ever, since fifteen years have passed and I have never seen her again. If she was a human being she must have died before this; if she was not, I rest in the conviction that she despised me too much to meddle with me.

"Now, then, bring on your theories! Give me your opinion about these strange events. Do you still regard them as entirely natural?"

Children and Old Folk

By Ivan Cankar. (1876-1918)

Translated by Helen P. Hlacha.

Each night, before they went to bed, the children used to chat together. Seating themselves on the ledge of the broad oven, they uttered whatever came into their minds. Through the dim window the evening twilight peered into the room with dream-laden eyes. Out of every corner the silent shadows drifted upwards, carrying strange stories with them.

They spoke of whatever came to their minds, but to their minds came only pleasant stories of sunlight and warmth interwoven with love and hope. The whole future was one long bright holiday; no Lent, between Christmas and Easter tide. Over there, somewhere behind the flowered curtain, all life, blinking and throbbing, silently poured from the light into light. Words were whispered and only half understood. No story had any beginning, nor definite form. No story had an end. At times all four children spoke at once, yet none confused the other. All gazed enthralled into a beauteous heavenly light where each word was clear and true, where each story had a clear and living face, and each tale its glorious finish.

The children bore so marked a resemblance to one another that in the dim twilight the face of the youngest, four-year-old Tonchek, could not be distinguished from that of the ten-year-old Loizka, the eldest. All had thin, narrow faces and large, wide-open eyes—introspective eyes.

That evening, something unknown from an unknown place reached with violent hand into that heavenly light and struck pitilessly among the holidays, the stories, and legends. The post had brought tidings that the father “had fallen” on Italian soil. Something unknown, new, strange, entirely incomprehensible rose before them. It stood there, tall and broad, but had neither face, nor eyes, nor mouth. Nowhere did it belong, not to that clamorous life before the church and on the street, nor to that warm twilight around the oven, nor to the stories.

It was nothing joyful, but neither was it particularly sorrowful, for it was dead; because it had no eyes that it might by their look reveal

wherefore and whence, and no mouth that it might explain by words. Thought stood humbly and timidly before that enormous apparition as before a great black wall, motionless. It approached the wall, and stared dumb and ponderous.

“But when will he come back?” asked Tonchek, wonderingly.

Loizka nudged him with an angry look. “How can he come back if he has fallen?”

All lapsed into silence. They stood before that great black wall, and beyond it they could not see.

“I’m going to war, too!” unexpectedly announced seven-year-old Matiche, as if he had swiftly hit up the right thought. That was evidently all that it was necessary to say.

“You’re too small,” admonished four-year-old Tonchek in a deep voice. Tonchek still wore dresses!

Milka, the thinnest and sickliest of them, who was wrapped in her mother’s large shawl and resembled a wayfarer’s pack, asked in her soft little voice from somewhere out of the shadows, “What is war like? Tell us, Matiche, tell us that story!”

Matiche explained, “Well, war is like this. People stab each other with knives, cut each other down with swords, and shoot each other with guns. The more you stab and cut down, the better it is. Nobody says anything to you, `cause that’s how it has to be. That’s war.”

“But why do they stab and cut each other down?” Milka insisted.

“For the Emperor!” said Matiche, and all were silent.

In the dim distance before their clouded eyes appeared something mighty, glistening with the radiance of glory. They sat motionless, their breaths barely daring to escape their mouths, as in church at the benediction.

Then Matiche again swiftly gathered his thoughts; possibly just to dispel the silence which lay so heavy over them. “I’m going to war, too. Against the enemy.”

“What is the enemy like? Has he horns?” suddenly inquired the thin

voice of Milka.

“Of course he has, else how could he be the enemy?” seriously, almost angrily replied Tonchek in emphatic tones. And now not even Matiche himself knew the correct answer.

“I don` t think he has them!” he said slowly, haltingly.

“How can he have horns? He`s a person like us,” voiced Loizka unwillingly. Then, reconsidering, she added, “Only he has no soul.”

After a lengthy pause Tonchek inquired, “But how does a person fall in the war? Like this, backward?” And he illustrated the point.

“They kill him to death!” calmly explained Matiche.

“Father promised to bring me a gun.”

“How can he bring you a gun if he has fallen?” Loizka roughly retorted.

“And they killed him-to death.”

“To death.”

Through the youthful and wide-open eyes silence and sorrow stared into darkness, into something unknown, to heart and mind inconceivable.

At the same time on a bench before the cottage sat the grandfather and grandmother. The last red rays of the sun glowed through the dark foliage in the garden. The evening was silent except for a smothered, prolonged sob, already grown hoarse, which came from the stable. In all probability it was the wail of the young mother who had gone there to tend the livestock.

The two old people sat deeply bowed, close to one another, and held each other`s hands as they had not done for a long time. They gazed into the heavenly afterglow with eyes devoid of tears, and did not speak.

The Fury

By Paul Heyse. (1830-1914)

The day had scarcely dawned. Over Vesuvius hung one broad gray stripe of mist, stretching across as far as Naples, and darkening all the small towns along the coast. The sea lay calm. Along the shore of the narrow creek that lies beneath the Sorrento cliffs, fishermen and their wives were at work already, some with giant cables drawing their boats to land, with the nets that had been cast the night before, while others were rigging their craft, trimming the sails, or fetching out oars and masts from the great grated vaults that have been built deep into the rocks for shelter to the tackle overnight. Nowhere an idle hand; even the very aged, who had long given up going to sea, fell into the long chain of those who were hauling in the nets. Here and there, on some flat housetop, an old woman stood and spun, or busied herself about her grandchildren, whom their mother had left to help her husband.

"Do you see, Rachela? yonder is our padre curato," said one to a little thing of ten, who brandished a small spindle by her side; "Antonio is to row him over to Capri. Madre Santissima! but the reverend signore's eyes are dull with sleep!" and she waved her hand to a benevolent-looking little priest, who was settling himself in the boat, and spreading out upon the bench his carefully tucked-up skirts.

The men upon the quay had dropped their work to see their pastor off, who bowed and nodded kindly, right and left.

"What for must he go to Capri, granny?" asked the child. "Have the people there no priest of their own, that they must borrow ours?"

"Silly thing!" returned the granny. "Priests they have in plenty—and the most beautiful of churches, and a hermit too, which is more than we have. But there lives a great signora, who once lived here; she was so very ill! Many's the time our padre had to go and take the Most Holy to her, when they thought she could not live the night. But with the Blessed Virgin's help she got strong and well, and was able to bathe every day in the sea. When she went away, she left a fine heap of ducats behind her for our church, and for the poor; and she would not go, they say, until our padre promised to go and see her over there, that she might confess to him as before. It is quite wonderful, the store she lays by him! Indeed, and we have cause to bless ourselves for having a curato who has gifts enough for an archbishop, and is in such request with all the great folks. The Madonna be with him!" she cried, and waved her hand again, as the boat was about to put from shore.

"Are we to have fair weather, my son?" inquired the little priest, with an anxious look toward Naples.

"The sun is not yet up," the young man answered; "when he comes, he will easily do for that small trifle of mist."

"Off with you, then! that we may arrive before the heat."

Antonio was just reaching for his long oar to shove away the boat, when suddenly he paused, and fixed his eyes upon the summit of the steep path that leads down from Sorrento to the water. A tall and slender girlish figure had become visible upon the heights, and was now hastily stepping down the stones, waving her handkerchief. She had a small bundle under her arm, and her dress was mean and poor. Yet she had a distinguished if somewhat savage way of throwing back her head, and the dark tress wreathed around it was like a diadem.

"What have we to wait for?" inquired the curato.

"There is some one coming who wants to go to Capri—with your permission, padre. We shall not go a whit the slower. It is a slight young thing, but just eighteen."

At that moment the young girl appeared from behind the wall that bounds the winding path.

"Laurella!" cried the priest; "and what has she to do in Capri?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. She came up with hasty steps, her eyes fixed straight before her.

"Ha! l'Arrabiata! good-morning!" shouted one or two of the young boatmen. But for the curato's presence, they might have added more; the look of mute defiance with which the young girl received their welcome appeared to tempt the more mischievous among them.

"Good-day, Laurella!" now said the priest; "how are you? Are you coming with us to Capri?"

"If I may, padre."

"Ask Antonio there; the boat is his. Every man is master of his own, I say, as God is master of us all."

"There is half a carlino, if I may go for that?" said Laurella, without looking at the young boatman.

"You need it more than I," he muttered, and pushed aside some orange-baskets to make room: he was to sell the oranges in Capri, which little isle of rocks has never been able to grow enough for all its visitors.

"I do not choose to go for nothing," said the girl, with a slight frown of her dark eyebrows.

"Come, child," said the priest; "he is a good lad, and had rather not enrich himself with that little morsel of your poverty. Come now, and step in," and he stretched out his hand to help her, "and sit you down by me. See, now, he has spread his jacket for you, that you may sit the softer. Young folks are all alike; for one little maiden of eighteen they will do more than for ten of us reverend fathers. Nay, no excuse, Tonino. It is the Lord's own doing, that like and like should hold together."

Meantime Laurella had stepped in, and seated herself beside the padre, first putting away Antonio's jacket without a word. The young fellow let it lie, and, muttering between his teeth, he gave one vigorous push against the pier, and the little boat flew out into the open bay.

"What are you carrying there in that little bundle?" inquired the padre, as they were floating on over a calm sea, now just beginning to be lighted up with the earliest rays of the rising sun. "Silk, thread, and a

loaf, padre. The silk is to be sold at Anacapri, to a woman who makes ribbons, and the thread to another."

"Spun by yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"You once learned to weave ribbons yourself, if I remember right?"

"I did, sir; but mother has been much worse, and I cannot stay so long from home; and a loom to ourselves we are not rich enough to buy."

"Worse, is she? Ah! dear, dear! when I was with you last, at Easter, she was up."

"The spring is always her worst time. Ever since those last great storms, and the earthquakes she has been forced to keep her bed from pain."

"Pray, my child. Never slacken your prayers and petitions that the Blessed Virgin may intercede for you; and be industrious and good, that your prayers may find a hearing."

After a pause: "When you were coming toward the shore, I heard them calling after you. 'Good-morning, l'Arrabiata!' they said. What made them call you so? It is not a nice name for a young Christian maiden, who should be meek and mild."

The young girl's brown face glowed all over, while her eyes flashed fire.

"They always mock me so, because I do not dance and sing, and stand about to chatter, as other girls do. I might be left in peace, I think; I do THEM no harm."

"Nay, but you might be civil. Let others dance and sing, on whom this life sits lighter; but a kind word now and then is seemly even from the most afflicted."

Her dark eyes fell, and she drew her eyebrows closer over them, as if she would have hidden them.

They went on a while in silence. The sun now stood resplendent above the mountain chain; only the tip of Mount Vesuvius towered beyond the

group of clouds that had gathered about its base; and on the Sorrento plains the houses were gleaming white from the dark green of their orange-gardens.

"Have you heard no more of that painter, Laurella?" asked the curato—"that Neapolitan, who wished so much to marry you?" She shook her head. "He came to make a picture of you. Why would you not let him?"

"What did he want it for? There are handsomer girls than I. Who knows what he would have done with it? He might have bewitched me with it, or hurt my soul, or even killed me, mother says."

"Never believe such sinful things!" said the little curato very earnestly. "Are not you ever in God's keeping, without whose will not one hair of your head can fall? and is one poor mortal with an image in his hand to prevail against the Lord? Besides, you might have seen that he was fond of you; else why should he want to marry you?"

She said nothing.

"And wherefore did you refuse him? He was an honest man, they say, and comely; and he would have kept you and your mother far better than you ever can yourself, for all your spinning and silk-winding."

"We are so poor!" she said passionately; "and mother has been ill so long, we should have become a burden to him. And then I never should have done for a signora. When his friends came to see him, he would only have been ashamed of me."

"How can you say so? I tell you the man was good and kind; he would even have been willing to settle in Sorrento. It will not be so easy to find another, sent straight from heaven to be the saving of you, as this man, indeed, appeared to be."

"I want no husband—I never shall," she said, very stubbornly, half to herself.

"Is this a vow? or do you mean to be a nun?"

She shook her head.

"The people are not so wrong who call you wilful, although the name they give you is not kind. Have you ever considered that you stand alone in the world, and that your perverseness must make your sick

mother's illness worse to bear, her life more bitter? And what sound reason can you have to give for rejecting an honest hand, stretched out to help you and your mother? Answer me, Laurella."

"I have a reason," she said reluctantly, and speaking low; "but it is one I cannot give."

"Not give! not give to me? not to your confessor, whom you surely know to be your friend—or is he not?"

Laurella nodded.

"Then, child, unburden your heart. If your reason be a good one, I shall be the very first to uphold you in it. Only you are young, and know so little of the world. A time may come when you will find cause to regret a chance of happiness thrown away for some foolish fancy now."

Shyly she threw a furtive glance over to the other end of the boat, where the young boatman sat, rowing fast. His woollen cap was pulled deep down over his eyes; he was gazing far across the water, with averted head, sunk, as it appeared, in his own meditations.

The priest observed her look, and bent his ear down closer.

"You did not know my father?" she whispered, while a dark look gathered in her eyes.

"Your father, child! Why, your father died when you were ten years old. What can your father (Heaven rest his soul in paradise!) have to do with this present perversity of yours?"

"You did not know him, padre; you did not know that mother's illness was caused by him alone."

"And how?"

"By his ill-treatment of her; he beat her and trampled upon her. I well remember the nights when he came home in his fits of frenzy. She never said a word, and did everything he bade her. Yet he would beat her so, my heart felt ready to break. I used to cover up my head and pretend to be asleep, but I cried all night. And then, when he saw her lying on the floor, quite suddenly he would change, and lift her up and kiss her, till she screamed and said he smothered her. Mother forbade me ever to say a word of this; but it wore her out. And in all these long

years since father died, she has never been able to get well again. And if she should soon die—which God forbid!—I know who it was that killed her."

The little curato's head wagged slowly to and fro; he seemed uncertain how far to acquiesce in the young girl's reasons. At length he said: "Forgive him, as your mother has forgiven! And turn your thoughts from such distressing pictures, Laurella; there may be better days in store for you, which will make you forget the past."

"Never shall I forget that!" she said, and shuddered. "And you must know, padre, it is the reason why I have resolved to remain unmarried. I never will be subject to a man, who may beat and then caress me. Were a man now to want to beat or kiss me, I could defend myself; but mother could not—neither from his blows nor kisses—because she loved him. Now, I will never so love a man as to be made ill and wretched by him."

"You are but a child, and you talk like one who knows nothing at all of life. Are all men like that poor father of yours? Do all ill-treat their wives, and give vent to every whim and gust of passion? Have you never seen a good man yet? or known good wives, who live in peace and harmony with their husbands?"

"But nobody ever knew how father was to mother; she would have died sooner than complain or tell of him, and all because she loved him. If this be love—if love can close our lips when they should cry out for help—if it is to make us suffer without resistance, worse than even our worst enemy could make us suffer—then, I say, I never will be fond of mortal man."

"I tell you you are childish; you know not what you are saying. When your time comes, you are not likely to be consulted whether you choose to fall in love or not." After a pause, he added, "And that painter: did you think he could have been cruel?"

"He made those eyes I have seen my father make, when he begged my mother's pardon and took her in his arms to make it up. I know those eyes. A man may make such eyes, and yet find it in his heart to beat a wife who never did a thing to vex him! It made my flesh creep to see those eyes again."

After this she would not say another word. The curato also remained silent. He bethought himself of more than one wise saying, wherewith

the maiden might have been admonished; but he refrained, in consideration of the young boatman, who had been growing rather restless toward the close of this confession.

When, after two hours' rowing, they reached the little bay of Capri, Antonio took the padre in his arms, and carried him through the last few ripples of shallow water, to set him reverently down upon his legs on dry land. But Laurella did not wait for him to wade back and fetch her. Gathering up her little petticoat, holding in one hand her wooden shoes and in the other her little bundle, with one splashing step or two she had reached the shore. "I have some time to stay at Capri," said the priest. "You need not wait—I may not perhaps return before to-morrow. When you get home, Laurella, remember me to your mother; I will come and see her within the week. You mean to go back before it gets dark?"

"If I find an opportunity," answered the girl, turning all her attention to her skirts.

"I must return, you know," said Antonio, in a tone which he believed to be one of great indifference. "I shall wait here till the Ave Maria. If you should not come, it is the same to me."

"You must come," interposed the little priest; "you never can leave your mother all alone at night. Is it far you have to go?"

"To a vineyard by Anacapri."

"And I to Capri. So now God bless you, child—and you, my son."

Laurella kissed his hand, and let one farewell drop, for the padre and Antonio to divide between them. Antonio, however, appropriated no part of it to himself; he pulled off his cap exclusively to the padre, without even looking at Laurella. But after they had turned their backs, he let his eyes travel but a short way with the padre, as he went toiling over the deep bed of small, loose stones; he soon sent them after the maiden, who, turning to the right, had begun to climb the heights, holding one hand above her eyes to protect them from the scorching sun. Just before the path disappeared behind high walls, she stopped, as if to gather breath, and looked behind her. At her feet lay the marina; the rugged rocks rose high around her; the sea was shining in the rarest of its deep-blue splendor. The scene was surely worth a moment's pause. But, as chance would have it, her eyes, in glancing past Antonio's boat, met Antonio's own, which had been following her

as she climbed.

Each made a slight movement, as persons do who would excuse themselves for some mistake; and then, with her darkest look, the maiden went her way.

Hardly one hour had passed since noon, and yet for the last two Antonio had been sitting waiting on the bench before the fishers' tavern. He must have been very much preoccupied with something, for he jumped up every moment to step out into the sunshine, and look carefully up and down the roads, which, parting right and left, lead to the only two little towns upon the island. He did not altogether trust the weather, he then said to the hostess of the osteria; to be sure, it was clear enough, but he did not quite like that tint of sea and sky. Just so it had looked, he said, before the last awful storm, when the English family had been so nearly lost; surely she must remember it?

No, indeed, she said, she didn't.

Well, if the weather should happen to change before night, she was to think of him, he said.

"Have you many fine folk over there?" she asked him, after a while.

"They are only just beginning; as yet, the season has been bad enough; those who came to bathe, came late."

"The spring came late. Have you not been earning more than we at Capri?"

"Not enough to give me macaroni twice a week, if I had had nothing but the boat—only a letter now and then to take to Naples, or a gentleman to row out into the open sea, that he might fish. But you know I have an uncle who is rich; he owns more than one fine orange-garden; and, 'Tonino,' says he to me, 'while I live you shall not suffer want; and when I am gone you will find that I have taken care of you.' And so, with God's help, I got through the winter."

"Has he children, this uncle who is rich?"

"No, he never married; he was long in foreign parts, and many a good piastre he has laid together. He is going to set up a great fishing business, and set me over it, to see the rights of it."

"Why, then you are a made man, Tonino!"

The young boatman shrugged his shoulders.

"Every man has his own burden," said he, starting up again to have another look at the weather, turning his eyes right and left, although he must have known that there can be no weather side but one.

"Let me fetch you another bottle," said the hostess; "your uncle can well afford to pay for it."

"Not more than one glass; it is a fiery wine you have in Capri, and my head is hot already."

"It does not heat the blood; you may drink as much of it as you like. And here is my husband coming; so you must sit a while, and talk to him."

And in fact, with his nets over his shoulder, and his red cap upon his curly head, down came the comely padrone of the osteria. He had been taking a dish of fish to that great lady, to set before the little curato. As soon as he caught sight of the young boatman, he began waving him a most cordial welcome; and he came to sit beside him on the bench, chattering and asking questions. Just as his wife was bringing her second bottle of pure unadulterated Capri, they heard the crisp sand crunch, and Laurella was seen approaching from the left-hand road to Anacapri. She nodded slightly in salutation; then stopped, and hesitated.

Antonio sprang from his seat. "I must go," he said. "It is a young Sorrento girl, who came over with the signor curato in the morning. She has to get back to her sick mother before night."

"Well, well, time enough yet before night," observed the fisherman; "time enough to take a glass of wine. Wife, I say, another glass!"

"I thank you; I had rather not;" and Laurella kept her distance.

"Fill the glasses, wife; fill them both, I say; she only wants a little pressing."

"Don't," interposed the lad. "It is a wilful head of her own she has; a saint could not persuade her to do what she does not choose." And, taking a hasty leave, he ran down to the boat, loosened the rope, and

stood waiting for Laurella. Again she bent her head to the hostess, and slowly approached the water, with lingering steps. She looked around on every side, as if in hopes of seeing some other passenger. But the marina was deserted. The fishermen were asleep, or rowing about the coast with rods or nets; a few women and children sat before their doors, spinning or sleeping: such strangers as had come over in the morning were waiting for the cool of the evening to return. She had not time to look about her long; before she could prevent him, Antonio had seized her in his arms and carried her to the boat, as if she had been an infant. He leaped in after her, and with a stroke or two of his oar they were in deep water.

She had seated herself at the end of the boat, half turning her back to him, so that he could only see her profile. She wore a sterner look than ever; the low, straight brow was shaded by her hair; the rounded lips were firmly closed; only the delicate nostril occasionally gave a wilful quiver. After they had gone on a while in silence, she began to feel the scorching of the sun; and, unloosening her bundle, she threw the handkerchief over her head, and began to make her dinner of the bread; for in Capri she had eaten nothing.

Antonio did not stand this long; he fetched out a couple of the oranges with which the baskets had been filled in the morning. "Here is something to eat to your bread, Laurella," he said. "Don't think I kept them for you; they had rolled out of the basket, and I only found them when I brought the baskets back to the boat."

"Eat them yourself; bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing in this heat, and you have had to walk so far."

"They gave me a drink of water, and that refreshed me."

"As you please," he said, and let them drop into the basket.

Silence again. The sea was smooth as glass. Not a ripple was heard against the prow. Even the white sea-birds that roost among the caves of Capri pursued their prey with soundless flight.

"You might take the oranges to your mother," again commenced Tonino.

"We have oranges at home; and when they are gone, I can go and buy some more."

"Nay, take these to her, and give them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"You could tell her who I am."

"I do not know you either."

It was not the first time that she had denied him thus. One Sunday of last year, when that painter had first come to Sorrento, Antonio had chanced to be playing boccia with some other young fellows in the little piazza by the chief street.

There, for the first time, had the painter caught sight of Laurella, who, with her pitcher on her head, had passed by without taking any notice of him. The Neapolitan, struck by her appearance, stood still and gazed after her, not heeding that he was standing in the very midst of the game, which, with two steps, he might have cleared. A very ungentle ball came knocking against his shins, as a reminder that this was not the spot to choose for meditation. He looked round, as if in expectation of some excuse. But the young boatman who had thrown the ball stood silent among his friends, in such an attitude of defiance that the stranger had found it more advisable to go his ways and avoid discussion. Still, this little encounter had been spoken of, particularly at the time when the painter had been pressing his suit to Laurella. "I do not even know him," she said indignantly, when the painter asked her whether it was for the sake of that uncourteous lad she now refused him. But she had heard that piece of gossip, and known Antonio well enough when she had met him since.

And now they sat together in this boat, like two most deadly enemies, while their hearts were beating fit to kill them. Antonio's usually so good-humored face was heated to scarlet; he struck the oars so sharply that the foam flew over to where Laurella sat, while his lips moved as if muttering angry words. She pretended not to notice, wearing her most unconscious look, bending over the edge of the boat, and letting the cool water pass between her fingers. Then she threw off her handkerchief again, and began to smooth her hair, as though she had been alone. Only her eyebrows twitched, and she held up her wet hands in vain attempts to cool her burning cheeks.

Now they were well out in the open sea. The island was far behind, and the coast before them lay yet distant in the hot haze. Not a sail

was within sight, far or near—not even a passing gull to break the stillness. Antonio looked all round, evidently ripening some hasty resolution. The color faded suddenly from his cheek, and he dropped his oars. Laurella looked round involuntarily—fearless, yet attentive.

"I must make an end of this," the young fellow burst forth. "It has lasted too long already! I only wonder that it has not killed me! You say you do not know me? And all this time you must have seen me pass you like a madman, my whole heart full of what I had to tell you; and then you only made your crooked mouth, and turned your back upon me."

"What had I to say to you?" she curtly replied. "I may have seen that you were inclined to meddle with me, but I do not choose to be on people's wicked tongues for nothing. I do not mean to have you for a husband—neither you nor any other."

"Nor any other? So you will not always say! You say so now, because you would not have that painter. Bah! you were but a child! You will feel lonely enough yet, some day; and then, wild as you are, you will take the next best who comes to hand."

"Who knows? which of us can see the future? It may be that I will change my mind. What is that to you?"

"What is it to me?" he flew out, starting to his feet, while the small boat leaped and danced; "what is it to me, you say? You know well enough! I tell you, that man shall perish miserably to whom you shall prove kinder than you have been to me!"

"And to you, what did I ever promise? Am I to blame if you be mad? What right have you to me?"

"Ah! I know," he cried, "my right is written nowhere. It has not been put in Latin by any lawyer, nor stamped with any seal. But this I feel: I have just the right to you that I have to heaven, if I die an honest Christian. Do you think I could look on and see you go to church with another man, and see the girls go by and shrug their shoulders at me?"

"You can do as you please. I am not going to let myself be frightened by all those threats. I also mean to do as I please."

"You shall not say so long!" and his whole frame shook with passion. "I am not the man to let my whole life be spoiled by a stubborn wench like you! You are in my power here, remember, and may be made to

do my bidding."

She could not repress a start, but her eyes flashed bravely on him.

"You may kill me if you dare," she said slowly.

"I do nothing by halves," he said, and his voice sounded choked and hoarse. "There is room for us both in the sea. I cannot help thee, child"—he spoke the last words dreamily, almost pitifully—"but we must both go down together—both at once—and now!" he shouted, and snatched her in his arms. But at the same moment he drew back his right hand; the blood gushed out; she had bitten him fiercely.

"Ha! can I be made to do your bidding?" she cried, and thrust him from her, with one sudden movement; "am I here in your power?" and she leaped into the sea, and sank.

She rose again directly; her scanty skirts clung close; her long hair, loosened by the waves, hung heavy about her neck. She struck out valiantly, and, without uttering a sound, she began to swim steadily from the boat toward the shore.

With senses benumbed by sudden terror, he stood, with outstretched neck, looking after her, his eyes fixed as though they had just been witness to a miracle. Then, giving himself a shake, he seized his oars, and began rowing after her with all the strength he had, while all the time the bottom of the boat was reddening fast with the blood that kept streaming from his hand.

Rapidly as she swam, he was at her side in a moment. "For the love of our most Holy Virgin" he cried, "get into the boat! I have been a madman! God alone can tell what so suddenly darkened my brain. It came upon me like a flash of lightning, and set me all on fire. I knew not what I did or said. I do not even ask you to forgive me, Laurella, only to come into the boat again, and not to risk your life!"

She swam on as though she had not heard him.

"You can never swim to land. I tell you, it is two miles off. Think of your mother! If you should come to grief, I should die of horror."

She measured the distance with her eye, and then, without answering him one word, she swam up to the boat, and laid her hands upon the edge; he rose to help her in. As the boat tilted over to one side with the

girl's weight, his jacket that was lying on the bench slipped into the water. Agile as she was, she swung herself on board without assistance, and gained her former seat. As soon as he saw that she was safe, he took to his oars again, while she began quietly wringing out her dripping clothes, and shaking the water from her hair. As her eyes fell upon the bottom of the boat, and saw the blood, she gave a quick look at the hand, which held the oar as if it had been unhurt.

"Take this," she said, and held out her handkerchief. He shook his head, and went on rowing. After a time she rose, and, stepping up to him, bound the handkerchief firmly round the wound, which was very deep. Then, heedless of his endeavors to prevent her, she took an oar, and, seating herself opposite him, began to row with steady strokes, keeping her eyes from looking toward him—fixed upon the oar that was scarlet with his blood. Both were pale and silent. As they drew near land, such fishermen as they met began shouting after Antonio and gibing at Laurella; but neither of them moved an eyelid, or spoke one word.

The sun stood yet high over Procida when they landed at the marina. Laurella shook out her petticoat, now nearly dry, and jumped on shore. The old spinning woman, who in the morning had seen them start, was still upon her terrace. She called down, "What is that upon your hand, Tonino? Jesus Christ! the boat is full of blood!"

"It is nothing, comare," the young fellow replied. "I tore my hand against a nail that was sticking out too far; it will be well to-morrow. It is only this confounded ready blood of mine, that always makes a thing look worse than it is."

"Let me come and bind it up, comparello. Stop one moment; I will go and fetch the herbs, and come to you directly."

"Never trouble yourself, comare. It has been dressed already; to-morrow morning it will be all over and forgotten. I have a healthy skin, that heals directly."

"Addio!" said Laurella, turning to the path that goes winding up the cliffs. "Good-night!" he answered, without looking at her; and then taking his oars and baskets from the boat, and climbing up the small stone stairs, he went into his own hut.

He was alone in his two little rooms, and began to pace them up and down. Cooler than upon the dead calm sea, the breeze blew fresh through the small unglazed windows, which could only be closed with

wooden shutters. The solitude was soothing to him. He stooped before the little image of the Virgin, devoutly gazing upon the glory round the head (made of stars cut out in silver paper). But he did not want to pray. What reason had he to pray, now that he had lost all he had ever hoped for?

And this day appeared to last for ever. He did so long for night! for he was weary, and more exhausted by the loss of blood than he would have cared to own. His hand was very sore. Seating himself upon a little stool, he untied the handkerchief that bound it; the blood, so long repressed, gushed out again; all round the wound the hand was swollen high.

He washed it carefully, cooling it in the water; then he clearly saw the marks of Laurella's teeth.

"She was right," he said; "I was a brute, and deserved no better. I will send her back the handkerchief by Giuseppe to-morrow. Never shall she set eyes on me again." And he washed the handkerchief with the greatest care, and spread it out in the sun to dry.

And having bound up his hand again, as well as he could manage with his teeth and his left hand, he threw himself upon his bed, and closed his eyes.

He was soon waked up from a sort of slumber by the rays of the bright moonlight, and also by the pain of his hand; he had just risen for more cold water to soothe its throbbings, when he heard the sound of some one at the door. Laurella stood before him.

She came in without a question, took off the handkerchief she had tied over her head, and placed her little basket upon the table; then she drew a deep breath.

"You are come to fetch your handkerchief," he said. "You need not have taken that trouble. In the morning I would have asked Giuseppe to take it to you."

"It is not the handkerchief," she said quickly. "I have been up among the hills to gather herbs to stop the blood; see here." And she lifted the lid of her little basket.

"Too much trouble," he said, not in bitterness—"far too much trouble. I am better, much better; but if I were worse, it would be no more than

I deserve. Why did you come at such a time? If any one should see you?

You know how they talk, even when they don't know what they are saying."

"I care for no one's talk," she said, passionately. "I came to see your hand, and put the herbs upon it; you cannot do it with your left."

"It is not worth while, I tell you."

"Let me see it then, if I am to believe you."

She took his hand, that was not able to prevent her, and unbound the linen. When she saw the swelling, she shuddered, and gave a cry: "Jesus Maria!"

"It is a little swollen," he said; "it will be over in four-and-twenty hours."

She shook her head. "It will certainly be a week before you can go to sea."

"More likely a day or two; and if not, what matters?"

She had fetched a basin, and began carefully washing out the wound, which he suffered passively, like a child. She then laid on the healing leaves, which at once relieved the burning pain, and finally bound it up with the linen she had brought with her.

When it was done: "I thank you," he said. "And now, if you would do me one more kindness, forgive the madness that came over me; forget all I said and did. I cannot tell how it came to pass; certainly it was not your fault—not yours. And never shall you hear from me again one word to vex you."

She interrupted him. "It is I who have to beg your pardon. I should have spoken differently. I might have explained it better, and not enraged you with my sullen ways. And now that bite—"

"It was in self-defence; it was high time to bring me to my senses. As I said before, it is nothing at all to signify. Do not talk of being forgiven; you only did me good, and I thank you for it. And now, here is your handkerchief; take it with you."

He held it to her, but yet she lingered, hesitated, and appeared to have some inward struggle. At length she said: "You have lost your jacket,

and by my fault; and I know that all the money for the oranges was in it. I did not think of this till afterward. I cannot replace it now; we have not so much at home—or if we had, it would be mother's. But this I have—this silver cross. That painter left it on the table the day he came for the last time. I have never looked at it all this while, and do not care to keep it in my box; if you were to sell it? It must be worth a few piastres, mother says. It might make up the money you have lost; and if not quite, I could earn the rest by spinning at night when mother is asleep."

"Nothing will make me take it," he said shortly, pushing away the bright new cross, which she had taken from her pocket.

"You must," she said; "how can you tell how long your hand may keep you from your work? There it lies; and nothing can make me so much as look at it again."

"Drop it in the sea, then."

"It is no present I want to make you; it is no more than is your due; it is only fair."

"Nothing from you can be due to me; and hereafter when we chance to meet, if you would do me a kindness, I beg you not to look my way. It would make me feel you were thinking of what I have done. And now good-night; and let this be the last word said."

She laid the handkerchief in the basket, and also the cross, and closed the lid. But when he looked into her face, he started. Great heavy drops were rolling down her cheeks; she let them flow unheeded.

"Maria Santissima!" he cried. "Are you ill? You are trembling from head to foot!"

"It is nothing," she said; "I must go home;" and with unsteady steps she was moving to the door, when suddenly she leaned her brow against the wall, and gave way to a fit of bitter sobbing. Before he could go to her she turned upon him suddenly, and fell upon his neck.

"I cannot bear it!" she cried, clinging to him as a dying thing to life—"I cannot bear it! I cannot let you speak so kindly, and bid me go, with all this on my conscience. Beat me! trample on me! curse me! Or if it can be that you love me still, after all I have done to you, take me and keep me, and do with me as you please; only do not send me away so!" She

could say no more for sobbing.

Speechless, he held her a while in his arms. "If I can love you still!" he cried at last. "Holy Mother of God! Do you think that all my best heart's blood has gone from me through that little wound? Don't you hear it hammering now, as though it would burst my breast and go to you? But if you say this to try me, or because you pity me, I can forget it. You are not to think you owe me this, because you know what I have suffered for you."

"No!" she said very resolutely, looking up from his shoulder into his face, with her tearful eyes; "it is because I love you; and let me tell you, it was because I always feared to love you that I was so cross. I will be so different now. I never could bear again to pass you in the street without one look! And lest you should ever feel a doubt, I will kiss you, that you may say, 'She kissed me;' and Laurella kisses no man but her husband."

She kissed him thrice, and, escaping from his arms: "And now good-night, amor mio, cara vita mia!" she said. "Lie down to sleep, and let your hand get well. Do not come with me; I am afraid of no man, save of you alone."

And so she slipped out, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the wall.

He remained standing by the window, gazing far out over the calm sea, while all the stars in heaven appeared to flit before his eyes.

The next time the little curato sat in his confessional, he sat smiling to himself. Laurella had just risen from her knees after a very long confession.

"Who would have thought it?" he said musingly—"that the Lord would so soon have taken pity upon that wayward little heart? And I had been reproaching myself for not having adjured more sternly that ill demon of perversity. Our eyes are but short-sighted to see the ways of Heaven! Well, may God bless her, I say, and let me live to go to sea with Laurella's eldest born, rowing me in his father's place! Ah! well, indeed! *l'Arrabiata!*"

By Rudolph Lindau. (1829-1910)

During many long years Hermann Fabricius had lost sight of his friend Henry Warren, and had forgotten him.

Yet when students together they had loved each other dearly, and more than once they had sworn eternal friendship. This was at a period which, though not very remote, we seem to have left far behind us—a time when young men still believed in eternal friendship, and could feel enthusiasm for great deeds or great ideas. Youth in the present day is, or thinks itself, more rational. Hermann and Warren in those days were simple-minded and ingenuous; and not only in the moment of elation, when they had sworn to be friends for ever, but even the next day, and the day after that, in sober earnestness, they had vowed that nothing should separate them, and that they would remain united through life. The delusion had not lasted long. The pitiless machinery of life had caught up the young men as soon as they left the university, and had thrown one to the right, the other to the left. For a few months they had exchanged long and frequent letters; then they had met once, and finally they had parted, each going his way. Their letters had become more scarce, more brief, and at last had ceased altogether. It would really seem that the fact of having interests in common is the one thing sufficiently powerful to prolong and keep up the life of epistolary relations. A man may feel great affection for an absent friend, and yet not find time to write him ten lines, while he will willingly expend daily many hours on a stranger from whom he expects something. None the less he may be a true and honest friend. Man is naturally selfish; the instinct of self-preservation requires it of him. Provided he be not wicked, and that he show himself ready to serve his neighbor—after himself—no one has a right to complain, or to accuse him of hard-heartedness.

At the time this story begins, Hermann had even forgotten whether he had written to Warren last, or whether he had left his friend's last letter unanswered. In a word, the correspondence which began so enthusiastically had entirely ceased. Hermann inhabited a large town, and had acquired some reputation as a writer. From time to time, in the course of his walks, he would meet a young student with brown hair, and mild, honest-looking blue eyes, whose countenance, with its frank and youthful smile, inspired confidence and invited the sympathy of the passer-by. Whenever Hermann met this young man he would say to himself, "How like Henry at twenty!" and for a few minutes memory would travel back to the already distant days of youth, and he would long to see his dear old Warren again. More than once, on the spur of the moment, he had resolved to try and find out what had become of

his old university comrade. But these good intentions were never followed up. On reaching home he would find his table covered with books and pamphlets to be reviewed, and letters from publishers or newspaper editors asking for "copy"—to say nothing of invitations to dinner, which must be accepted or refused; in a word, he found so much URGENT business to despatch that the evening would go by, and weariness would overtake him, before he could make time for inquiring about his old friend.

In the course of years, the life of most men becomes so regulated that no time is left for anything beyond "necessary work." But, indeed, the man who lives only for his own pleasure—doing, so to speak, nothing—is rarely better in this respect than the writer, the banker, and the savant, who are overburdened with work.

One afternoon, as Hermann, according to his custom, was returning home about five o'clock, his porter handed him a letter bearing the American post-mark. He examined it closely before opening it. The large and rather stiff handwriting on the address seemed familiar, and yet he could not say to whom it belonged. Suddenly his countenance brightened, and he exclaimed, "A letter from Henry!" He tore open the envelope, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR HERMANN,—It is fortunate that one of us at least should have attained celebrity. I saw your name on the outside of a book of which you are the author. I wrote at once to the publisher; that obliging man answered me by return of post, and, thanks to these circumstances, I am enabled to tell you that I will land at Hamburg towards the end of September. Write to me there, *Poste Restante*, and let me know if you are willing to receive me for a few days. I can take Leipzig on my way home, and would do so most willingly if you say that you would see me again with pleasure.

"Your old friend,

"HENRY WARREN."

Below the signature there was a postscript of a single line: "This is my present face." And from an inner envelope Hermann drew a small photograph, which he carried to the window to examine leisurely. As he looked, a painful impression of sadness came over him. The portrait was that of an old man. Long gray hair fell in disorder over a careworn brow; the eyes, deep sunk in their sockets, had a strange and disquieting look of fixity; and the mouth, surrounded by deep furrows, seemed to tell its own long tale of sorrow.

"Poor Henry!" said Hermann; "this, then, is your present face! And yet he is not old; he is younger than I am; he can scarcely be thirty-eight. Can I, too, be already an old man?"

He walked up to the glass, and looked attentively at the reflection of his own face. No! those were not the features of a man whose life was near its close; the eye was bright, and the complexion indicated vigor and health. Still, it was not a young face. Thought and care had traced their furrows round the mouth and about the temples, and the general expression was one of melancholy, not to say despondency.

"Well, well, we have grown old," said Hermann, with a sigh. "I had not thought about it this long while; and now this photograph has reminded me of it painfully." Then he took up his pen and wrote to say how happy he would be to see his old friend again as soon as possible.

The next day chance brought him face to face in the street with the young student who was so like Warren. "Who knows?" thought Hermann; "fifteen or twenty years hence this young man may look no brighter than Warren does today. Ah, life is not easy! It has a way of saddening joyous looks, and imparting severity to smiling lips. As for me, I have no real right to complain of my life. I have lived pretty much like everybody; a little satisfaction, and then a little disappointment, turn by turn; and often small worries; and so my youth has gone by, I scarcely know how."

On the 2d of October Hermann received a telegram from Hamburg announcing the arrival of Warren for the same evening. At the appointed hour he went to the railway station to meet his friend. He saw him get down from the carriage slowly, and rather heavily, and he watched him for a few seconds before accosting him. Warren appeared to him old and broken-down, and even more feeble than he had expected to see him from his portrait. He wore a travelling suit of gray cloth, so loose and wide that it hung in folds on the gaunt and stooping figure; a large wide-awake hat was drawn down to his very eyes. The new-comer looked right and left, seeking no doubt to discover his friend; not seeing him, he turned his weary and languid steps towards the way out. Hermann then came forward. Warren recognized him at once; a sunny, youthful smile lighted up his countenance, and, evidently much moved, he stretched out his hand. An hour later, the two friends were seated opposite to each other before a well-spread table in Hermann's comfortable apartments.

Warren ate very little; but, on the other hand, Hermann noticed with surprise and some anxiety that his friend, who had been formerly a model of sobriety, drank a good deal. Wine, however, seemed to have no effect on him. The pale face did not flush; there was the same cold, fixed look in the eye; and his speech, though slow and dull in tone, betrayed no embarrassment.

When the servant who had waited at dinner had taken away the dessert and brought in coffee, Hermann wheeled two big arm-chairs close to the fire, and said to his friend:

"Now, we will not be interrupted. Light a cigar, make yourself at home, and tell me all you have been doing since we parted."

Warren pushed away the cigars. "If you do not mind," said he, "I will smoke my pipe. I am used to it, and I prefer it to the best of cigars."

So saying, he drew from its well-worn case an old pipe, whose color showed it had been long used, and filled it methodically with moist, blackish tobacco. Then he lighted it, and after sending forth one or two loud puffs of smoke, he said, with an air of sovereign satisfaction:

"A quiet, comfortable room—a friend—a good pipe after dinner—and no care for the morrow. That's what I like."

Hermann cast a sidelong glance at his companion, and was painfully struck at his appearance. The tall gaunt frame in its stooping attitude; the grayish hair and sad, fixed look; the thin legs crossed one over the other; the elbow resting on the knee and supporting the chin,—in a word, the whole strange figure, as it sat there, bore no resemblance to Henry Warren, the friend of his youth. This man was a stranger, a mysterious being even. Nevertheless, the affection he felt for his friend was not impaired; on the contrary, pity entered into his heart. "How ill the world must have used him," thought Hermann, "to have thus disfigured him!" Then he said aloud:

"Now, then, let me have your story, unless you prefer to hear mine first."

He strove to speak lightly, but he felt that the effort was not successful. As to Warren, he went on smoking quietly, without saying a word. The long silence at last became painful. Hermann began to feel an uncomfortable sensation of distress in presence of the strange guest he had brought to his home. After a few minutes he ventured to ask for

the third time, "Will you make up your mind to speak, or must I begin?"

Warren gave vent to a little noiseless laugh. "I am thinking how I can answer your question. The difficulty is that, to speak truly, I have absolutely nothing to tell. I wonder now—and it was that made me pause—how it has happened that, throughout my life, I have been bored by—nothing. As if it would not have been quite as natural, quite as easy, and far pleasanter, to have been amused by that same nothing—which has been my life. The fact is, my dear fellow, that I have had no deep sorrow to bear, neither have I been happy. I have not been extraordinarily successful, and have drawn none of the prizes of life. But I am well aware that, in this respect, my lot resembles that of thousands of other men. I have always been obliged to work. I have earned my bread by the sweat of my brow. I have had money difficulties; I have even had a hopeless passion—but what then? every one has had that. Besides, that was in bygone days; I have learned to bear it, and to forget. What pains and angers me is, to have to confess that my life has been spent without satisfaction and without happiness."

He paused an instant, and then resumed, more calmly: "A few years ago I was foolish enough to believe that things might in the end turn out better. I was a professor with a very moderate salary at the school at Elmira. I taught all I knew, and much that I had to learn in order to be able to teach it—Greek and Latin, German and French, mathematics and physical sciences. During the so-called play-hours, I even gave music lessons. In the course of the whole day there were few moments of liberty for me. I was perpetually surrounded by a crowd of rough, ill-bred boys, whose only object during lessons was to catch me making a fault in English. When evening came, I was quite worn out; still, I could always find time to dream for half an hour or so with my eyes open before going to bed. Then all my desires were accomplished, and I was supremely happy. At last I had drawn a prize! I was successful in everything; I was rich, honored, powerful—what more can I say? I astonished the world—or rather, I astonished Ellen Gilmore, who for me was the whole world. Hermann, have you ever been as mad? Have you, too, in a waking dream, been in turn a statesman, a millionaire, the author of a sublime work, a victorious general, the head of a great political party? Have you dreamt nonsense such as that? I, who am here, have been all I say—in dreamland. Never mind; that was a good time. Ellen Gilmore, whom I have just mentioned, was the eldest sister of one of my pupils, Francis Gilmore, the most undisciplined boy of the school. His parents, nevertheless, insisted on his learning something; and as I had the

reputation of possessing unwearying patience, I was selected to give him private lessons. That was how I obtained a footing in the Gilmore family. Later on, when they had found out that I was somewhat of a musician—you may remember, perhaps, that for an amateur I was a tolerable performer on the piano—I went every day to the house to teach Latin and Greek to Francis, and music to Ellen.

"Now, picture to yourself the situation, and then laugh at your friend as he has laughed at himself many a time. On the one side—the Gilmore side—a large fortune and no lack of pride; an intelligent, shrewd, and practical father; an ambitious and vain mother; an affectionate but spoilt boy; and a girl of nineteen, surpassingly lovely, with a cultivated mind and great good sense. On the other hand, you have Henry Warren, aged twenty-nine; in his dreams the author of a famous work, or the commander-in-chief of the Northern armies, or, it may be, President of the Republic—in reality, Professor at Elmira College, with a modest stipend of seventy dollars a month. Was it not evident that the absurdity of my position as a suitor for Ellen would strike me at once? Of course it did. In my lucid moments, when I was not dreaming, I was a very rational man, who had read a good deal, and learned not a little; and it would have been sheer madness in me to have indulged for an instant the hope of a marriage between Ellen and myself. I knew it was an utter impossibility—as impossible as to be elected President of the United States; and yet, in spite of myself, I dreamed of it. However, I must do myself the justice to add that my passion inconvenienced nobody. I would no more have spoken of it than of my imaginary command of the army of the Potomac. The pleasures which my love afforded me could give umbrage to no one. Yet I am convinced that Ellen read my secret. Not that she ever said a word to me on the subject; no look or syllable of hers could have made me suspect that she had guessed the state of my mind.

"One single incident I remember which was not in accordance with her habitual reserve in this respect. I noticed one day that her eyes were red. Of course I dared not ask her why she had cried. During the lesson she seemed absent; and when leaving she said, without looking at me, 'I may perhaps be obliged to interrupt our lessons for some little time; I am very sorry. I wish you every happiness.' Then, without raising her eyes, she quickly left the room. I was bewildered. What could her words mean? And why had they been said in such an affectionate tone?

"The next day Francis Gilmore called to inform me, with his father's compliments, that he was to have four days' holidays, because his

sister had just been betrothed to Mr. Howard, a wealthy New York merchant, and that, for the occasion, there would be great festivities at home.

"Thenceforward there was an end of the dreams which up to that moment had made life pleasant. In sober reason I had no more cause to deplore Ellen's marriage than to feel aggrieved because Grant had succeeded Johnson as President. Nevertheless, you can scarcely conceive how much this affair—I mean the marriage—grieved me. My absolute nothingness suddenly stared me in the face. I saw myself as I was—a mere schoolmaster, with no motive for pride in the past, or pleasure in the present, or hope in the future."

Warren's pipe had gone out while he was telling his story. He cleaned it out methodically, drew from his pocket a cake of Cavendish tobacco, and, after cutting off with a penknife the necessary quantity, refilled his pipe and lit it. The way in which he performed all these little operations betrayed long habit. He had ceased to speak while he was relighting his pipe, and kept on whistling between his teeth. Hermann looked on—silently. After a few minutes, and when the pipe was in good order, Warren resumed his story.

"For a few weeks I was terribly miserable; not so much because I had lost Ellen—a man cannot lose what he has never hoped to possess—as from the ruin of all my illusions. During those days I plucked and ate by the dozen of the fruits of the tree of self-knowledge, and I found them very bitter. I ended by leaving Elmira, to seek my fortunes elsewhere. I knew my trade well. Long practice had taught me how to make the best of my learning, and I never had any difficulty in finding employment. I taught successively in upwards of a dozen States of the Union. I can scarcely recollect the names of all the places where I have lived—Sacramento, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Boston, New York; I have been everywhere—everywhere. And everywhere I have met with the same rude schoolboys, just as I have found the same regular and irregular verbs in Latin and Greek. If you would see a man thoroughly satiated and saturated with schoolboys and classical grammars, look at me.

"In the leisure time which, whatever might be my work, I still contrived to make for myself, I indulged in philosophical reflections. Then it was I took to the habit of smoking so much."

Warren stopped suddenly, and, looking straight before him, appeared plunged in thought. Then, passing his hand over his forehead, he

repeated, in an absent manner, "Yes, of smoking so much. I also took to another habit," he added, somewhat hastily; "but that has nothing to do with my story. The theory which especially occupied my thoughts was that of the oscillations of an ideal instrument of my own imagining, to which, in my own mind, I gave the name of the Philosopher's Pendulum. To this invention I owe the quietude of mind which has supported me for many years, and which, as you see, I now enjoy. I said to myself that my great sorrow—if I may so call it without presumption—had arisen merely from my wish to be extraordinarily happy. When, in his dreams, a man has carried presumption so far as to attain to the heights of celebrity, or to being the husband of Ellen Gilmore, there was nothing wonderful if, on awaking, he sustained a heavy fall before reaching the depths of reality. Had I been less ambitious in my desires, their realization would have been easier, or, at any rate, the disappointment would have been less bitter. Starting from this principle, I arrived at the logical conclusion that the best means to avoid being unhappy is to wish for as little happiness as possible. This truth was discovered by my philosophical forefathers many centuries before the birth of Christ, and I lay no claim to being the finder of it; but the outward symbol which I ended by giving to this idea is—at least I fancy it is—of my invention.

"Give me a sheet of paper and a pencil," he added, turning to his friend, "and with a few lines I can demonstrate clearly the whole thing."

Hermann handed him what he wanted without a word. Warren then began gravely to draw a large semicircle, open at the top, and above the semicircular line a pendulum, which fell perpendicularly and touched the circumference at the exact point where on the dial of a clock would be inscribed the figure VI. This done, he wrote on the right-hand side of the pendulum, beginning from the bottom and at the places of the hours V, IV, III, the words Moderate Desires—Great Hopes, Ambition—Unbridled Passion, Mania of Greatness. Then, turning the paper upside-down, he wrote on the opposite side, where on a dial would be marked VII, VIII, IX, the words Slight Troubles—Deep Sorrow, Disappointment—Despair. Lastly, in the place of No. VI, just where the pendulum fell, he sketched a large black spot, which he shaded off with great care, and above which he wrote, like a scroll, Dead Stop, Absolute Repose.

Having finished this little drawing, Warren laid down his pipe, inclined his head on one side, and raising his eyebrows, examined his work with a critical frown. "This compass is not yet quite complete," he said; "there is something missing. Between Dead Stop and Moderate

Desires on the right, and Slight Troubles on the left, there is the beautiful line of Calm and Rational Indifference. However, such as the drawing is, it is sufficient to demonstrate my theory. Do you follow me?"

Hermann nodded affirmatively. He was greatly pained. In lieu of the friend of his youth, for whom he had hoped a brilliant future, here was a poor monomaniac!

"You see," said Warren, speaking collectedly, like a professor, "if I raise my pendulum till it reaches the point of Moderate Desires and then let it go, it will naturally swing to the point of Slight Troubles, and go no further. Then it will oscillate for some time in a more and more limited space on the line of Indifference, and finally it will stand still without any jerk on Dead Stop, Absolute Repose. That is a great consolation!"

He paused, as if waiting for some remark from Hermann; but as the latter remained silent, Warren resumed his demonstration.

"You understand now, I suppose, what I am coming to. If I raise the pendulum to the point of Ambition or Mania of Greatness, and then let it go, that same law which I have already applied will drive it to Deep Sorrow or Despair. That is quite clear, is it not?"

"Quite clear," repeated Hermann sadly.

"Very well," continued Warren, with perfect gravity; "for my misfortune, I discovered this fine theory rather late. I had not set bounds to my dreams and limited them to trifles. I had wished to be President of the Republic, an illustrious savant, the husband of Ellen. No great things, eh? What say you to my modesty? I had raised the pendulum to such a giddy height that when it slipped from my impotent hands it naturally performed a long oscillation, and touched the point Despair. That was a miserable time. I hope you have never suffered what I suffered then. I lived in a perpetual nightmare—like the stupor at intoxication." He paused, as he had done before, and then, with a painfully nervous laugh, he added, "Yes, like intoxication. I drank." Suddenly a spasm seemed to pass over his face, he looked serious and sad as before, and he said, with a shudder, "It's a terrible thing to see one's self inwardly, and to know that one is fallen."

After this he remained long silent. At last, raising his head, he turned to his friend and said, "Have you had enough of my story, or would you

like to hear it to the end?"

"I am grieved at all you have told me," said Hermann; "but pray go on; it is better I should know all."

"Yes; and I feel, too, that it relieves me to pour out my heart. Well, I used to drink. One takes to the horrid habit in America far easier than anywhere else. I was obliged to give up more than one good situation because I had ceased to be RESPECTABLE. Anyhow, I always managed to find employment without any great difficulty. I never suffered from want, though I have never known plenty. If I spent too much in drink, I took it out of my dress and my boots.

"Eighteen months after I had left Elmira, I met Ellen one day in Central Park, in New York. I was aware that she had been married a twelve-month. She knew me again at once, and spoke to me. I would have wished to sink into the earth. I knew that my clothes were shabby, that I looked poor, and I fancied that she must discern on my face the traces of the bad habits I had contracted. But she did not, or would not, see anything. She held out her hand, and said in her gentle voice:

"I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Warren. I have inquired about you, but neither my father nor Francis could tell me what had become of you. I want to ask you to resume the lessons you used to give me. Perhaps you do not know where I live? This is my address,' and she gave me her card.

"I stammered out a few unmeaning words in reply to her invitation. She looked at me, smiling kindly the while; but suddenly the smile vanished, and she added, 'Have you been ill, Mr. Warren? You seem worn.'

"'Yes,' I answered, too glad to find an excuse for my appearance—'yes,

I have been ill, and I am still suffering.'

"'I am very sorry,' she said, in a low voice.

"Laugh at me, Hermann—call me an incorrigible madman; but believe me when I say that her looks conveyed to me the impression of more than common interest or civility. A thrilling sense of pain shot through my frame. What had I done that I should be so cruelly tried? A mist passed before my eyes; anxiety, intemperance, sleeplessness, had made me weak. I tottered backwards a few steps. She turned horribly pale. All around us was the crowd—the careless, indifferent crowd.

"Come and see me soon,' she added hastily, and left me. I saw her get into a carriage, which she had doubtless quitted to take a walk; and when she drove past, she put her head out and looked at me with her eyes wide open—there was an almost wildly anxious expression in them.

"I went home. My way led me past her house—it was a palace. I shut myself up in my wretched hotel-room, and once more I fell to dreaming. Ellen loved me; she admired me; she was not for ever lost to me! The pendulum was swinging, you see, up as high as Madness. Explain to me, if you can, how it happens that a being perfectly rational in ordinary life should at certain seasons, and, so to speak, voluntarily, be bereft of reason. To excuse and explain my temporary insanity, I am ready to admit that the excitement to which I gave way may have been a symptom of the nervous malady which laid hold of me a few days later, and stretched me for weeks upon a bed of pain.

"As I became convalescent, reason and composure returned. But it was too late. In the space of two months, twenty years had passed over my head. When I rose from my sick-bed I was as feeble and as broken-down as you see me now. My past had been cheerless and dim, without one ray of happiness; yet that past was all my life! Henceforward there was nothing left for me to undertake, to regret, or to desire. The pendulum swung idly backwards and forwards on the line of Indifference. I wonder what are the feelings of successful men—of men who HAVE been victorious generals, prime ministers, celebrated authors, and that sort of tiling! Upheld by a legitimate pride, do they retire satisfied from the lists when evening conies, or do they lay down their arms as I did, disappointed and dejected, and worn out with the fierce struggle? Can no man with impunity look into his own heart and ask himself how his life has been spent?"

Here Warren made a still longer pause than before, and appeared absorbed in gloomy thought. At last he resumed in a lower tone:

"I had not followed up Ellen's invitation. But in some way she had discovered my address, and knew of my illness. Do not be alarmed, my dear Hermann; my story will not become romantic. No heavenly vision appeared to me during my fever; I felt no gentle white hands laid on my burning brow. I was nursed at the hospital, and very well nursed too; I figured there as 'Number 380,' and the whole affair was, as you see, as prosaic as possible. But on quitting the hospital, and as I was taking leave of the manager, he handed me a letter, in which was

enclosed a note for five hundred dollars. In the envelope there was also the following anonymous note:

"An old friend begs your acceptance, as a loan, of the inclosed sum. It will be time enough to think of paying off this debt when you are strong enough to resume work, and you can then do it by instalments, of which you can yourself fix the amount, and remit them to the hospital of New York.'

"It was well meant, no doubt, but it caused me a painful impression. My determination was taken at once. I refused without hesitation. I asked the manager, who had been watching me with a friendly smile while I read the letter, whether he could give the name of the person who had sent it. In spite of his repeated assurances that he did not know it, I never doubted for a single instant that he was concealing the truth. After a few seconds' reflection I asked if he would undertake to forward an answer to my unknown correspondent; and, on his consenting to do so, I promised that he should have my answer the next day.

"I thought long over my letter. One thing was plain to me—it was Ellen who had come to my help. How could I reject her generous aid without wounding her or appearing ungrateful? After great hesitation I wrote a few lines, which, as far as I can recollect, ran thus:

"I thank you for the interest you have shown me, but it is impossible for me to accept the sum you place at my disposal. Do not be angry with me because I return it. Do not withdraw your sympathy; I will strive to remain worthy of it, and will never forget your goodness.'

"A few days later, after having confided this letter to the manager, I left New York for San Francisco. For several years I heard nothing of Ellen; her image grew gradually fainter, and at last almost disappeared from my memory.

"The dark river that bore the frail bark which carried me and my fortunes was carrying me smoothly and unconsciously along towards the mysterious abyss where all that exists is engulfed. Its course lay through a vast desert; and the banks which passed before my eyes were of fearful sameness. Indescribable lassitude took possession of my whole being. I had never, knowingly, practised evil; I had loved and sought after good. Why, then, was I so wretched? I would have blessed the rock which wrecked my bark so that I might have been swallowed up and have gone down to my eternal rest. Up to the day when I heard of Ellen's betrothal, I had hoped that the morrow would

bring happiness. The long-wished-for morrow had come at last, gloomy and colorless, without realizing any of my vague hopes. Henceforth my life was at an end."

Warren said these last words so indistinctly that Hermann could scarcely hear them; he seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to his friend. Then he raised the forefinger of his right hand, and after moving it slowly from right to left, in imitation of the swing of a pendulum, he placed it on the large black dot he had drawn on the sheet of paper exactly below his pendulum, and said, "Dead Stop, Absolute Repose. Would that the end were come!"

Another and still longer interval of silence succeeded, and at last Hermann felt constrained to speak.

"How came you to make up your mind," he said, "to return to Europe?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure," answered Warren, hurriedly; "the story—the foolish story—is not ended. In truth it has no end, as it had no beginning; it is a thing without form or purpose, and less the history of a life than of a mere journeying towards death. Still I will finish—following chronological order. It does not weary you?"

"No, no; go on, my dear friend."

"Very well. I spent several years in the United States. The pendulum worked well. It came and went, to and fro, slowly along the line of Indifference, without ever transgressing as its extreme limits on either hand, Moderate Desires and Slight Troubles. I led obscurely a contemplative life, and I was generally considered a queer character. I fulfilled my duties, and took little heed of any one. Whenever I had an hour at my disposal, I sought solitude in the neighboring woods, far from the town and from mankind. I used to lie down under the big trees. Every season in turn, spring and summer, autumn and winter, had its peculiar charm for me. My heart, so full of bitterness, felt lightened as soon as I listened to the rustling of the foliage overhead. The forest! There is nothing finer in all creation. A deep calm seemed to settle down upon me. I was growing old. I was forgetting. It was about this time that, in consequence of my complete indifference to all surroundings, I acquired the habit of answering 'Very well' to everything that was said. The words came so naturally that I was not aware of my continual use of them, until one day one of my fellow-teachers happened to tell me that masters and pupils alike had given me the nickname of 'Very well.' Is it not odd that one who has never succeeded in anything should be known as 'Very well'?"

"I have only one other little adventure to relate, and I will have told all. Then I can listen to your story.

"Last year, my journeyings brought me to the neighborhood of Elmira. It was holiday-time. I had nothing to do, and I had in my purse a hundred hardly earned dollars, or thereabout. The wish seized me to revisit the scene of my joys and my sorrows. I had not set foot in the place for more than seven years. I was so changed that nobody could know me again; nor would I have cared much if they had. After visiting the town and looking at my old school, and the house where Ellen had lived, I bent my steps towards the park, which is situated in the environs—a place where I used often to walk in company of my youthful dreams. It was September, and evening was closing in. The oblique rays of the setting sun sent a reddish gleam the leafy branches of the old oaks. I seated on a bench beneath a tree on one side of the path. As I drew near I recognized Ellen. I remained rooted to the spot where I stood, not daring to move a step. She was stooping forward with her head bent down, while with the end of her parasol she traced lines upon the gravel. She had not seen me. I turned back instantly, and retired without making any noise. When I had gone a little distance, I left the path and struck into the wood. Once there, I looked back cautiously. Ellen was still at the same place and in the same attitude. Heaven knows what thoughts passed through my brain! I longed to see her closer. What danger was there? I was sure she would not know me again. I walked towards her with the careless step of a casual passer-by, and in a few minutes passed before her. When my shadow fell on the path, she looked up, and our eyes met. My heart was beating fast. Her look was cold and indifferent; but suddenly a strange light shot into her eyes, and she made a quick movement, as if to rise. I saw no more, and went on without turning round. Before I could get out of the park her carriage drove past me, and I saw her once more as I had seen her five years before in Central Park, pale, with distended eyes, and her anxious looks fixed upon me. Why did I not bow to her? I cannot say; my courage failed me. I saw the light die out of her eyes. I almost fancied that I saw her heave a sigh of relief as she threw herself back carelessly in the carriage; and she disappeared. I was then thirty-six, and I am almost ashamed to relate the schoolboy's trick of which I was guilty. I sent her the following lines: 'A devoted friend, whom you obliged in former days, and who met you yesterday in the park without your recognizing him, sends you his remembrances.' I posted this letter a few minutes before getting into the train which was to take me to New York; and, as I did so, my heart beat as violently as though I had performed a heroic deed. Great

adventures, forsooth! And to think that my life presents none more striking, and that trifles such as these are the only food for my memory!

"A twelvemonth later I met Francis Gilmore in Broadway. The world is small—so small that it is really difficult to keep out of the way of people one has once known. The likeness of my former pupil to his sister struck me, and I spoke to him. He looked at me at first with a puzzled expression, but after a few moments of hesitation he recognized me, a bright smile lighted up his pleasant face, and he shook hands warmly.

"'Mr. Warren,' he exclaimed, 'how glad I am to see you! Ellen and I have often talked of you, and wondered what could have become of you. Why did we never hear from you?'

"'I did not suppose it would interest you.' I spoke timidly; and yet I owed nothing to the young fellow, and wanted nothing of him.

"'You wrong us by saying that,' replied Francis; 'do you think me ungrateful? Do you fancy I have forgotten our pleasant walks in former days, and the long conversations we used to have? You alone ever taught me anything, and it is to you I owe the principles that have guided me through life. Many a day I have thought of you, and regretted you sincerely. As regards Ellen, no one has ever filled your place with her; she plays to this day the same pieces of music you taught her, and follows all your directions with a fidelity that would touch you.'

"'How are your father and mother, and how is your sister?' I inquired, feeling more deeply moved than I can express.

"'My poor mother died three years ago. It is Ellen who keeps house now.'

"'Your brother-in-law lives with you, then?'

"'My brother-in-law!' replied Francis, with surprise; 'did you not know that he was on board the Atlantic, which was lost last year in the passage from Liverpool to New York?'

"'I could find no words to reply.

"'As to that,' added Francis, with great composure—'between you and me, he was no great loss. My dear brother-in-law was not by any means what my father fancied he was when he gave him my sister as

a wife. The whole family has often regretted the marriage. Ellen lived apart from her husband for many years before his death.'

"I nodded so as to express my interest in his communications, but I could not for worlds have uttered a syllable.

"'You will come and see us soon, I hope,' added Francis, without noticing my emotion. 'We are still at the same place; but to make sure, here is my card. Come, Mr. Warren—name your own day to come and dine with us. I promise you a hearty welcome.'

"I got off by promising to write the next day, and we parted.

"Fortunately my mind had lost its former liveliness. The pendulum, far from being urged to unruly motion, continued to swing slowly in the narrow space where it had oscillated for so many years. I said to myself that to renew my intimacy with the Gilmores would be to run the almost certain risk of reviving the sorrows and the disappointments of the past. I was then calm and rational. It would be madness in me, I felt, to aspire to the hand of a young, wealthy, and much admired widow. To venture to see Ellen again was to incur the risk of seeing my reason once more wrecked, and the fatal chimera which had been the source of all my misery start into life again. If we are to believe what poets say, love ennobles man and exalts him into a demigod. It may be so, but it turns him likewise into a fool and a madman. That was my case. At any cost I was to guard against that fatal passion. I argued seriously with myself, and I determined to let the past be, and to reject every opportunity of bringing it to life again.

"A few days before my meeting with Francis, I had received tidings of the death of an old relative, whom I scarcely knew. In my childhood I had, on one or two occasions, spent my holidays at his house. He was gloomy and taciturn, but nevertheless he had always welcomed me kindly. I have a vague remembrance of having been told that he had been in love with my mother once upon a time, and that on hearing of her marriage he had retired into the solitude which he never left till the day of his death. Be that as it may, I had not lost my place in his affections, it seems: he had continued to feel an interest in me; and on his deathbed he had remembered me, and left me the greater part of his not very considerable fortune. I inherited little money; but there was a small, comfortably-furnished country-house, and an adjoining farm let on a long lease for two hundred and forty pounds per annum. This was wealth for me, and more than enough to satisfy all my wants. Since I had heard of this legacy I had been doubtful as to my

movements. My chance meeting with Francis settled the matter. I resolved at once to leave America, and to return to live in my native country. I knew your address, and wrote to you at once. I trusted that the sight of my old and only friend would console me for the disappointments that life has inflicted on me—and I have not been deceived. At last I have been able to open my heart to a fellow-creature, and relieve myself of the heavy burden which I have borne alone ever since our separation. Now I feel lighter. You are not a severe judge. Doubtless you deplore my weakness, but you do not condemn me. If, as I have already said, I have done no good, neither have I committed any wicked action. I have been a nonentity—an utterly useless being; 'one too many,' like the sad hero of Tourgueneff's sad story. Before leaving, I wrote to Francis informing him that the death of a relative obliged me to return to Europe, and giving him your address, so as not to seem to be running away from him. Then I went on board, and at last reached your home. Dixi!"

Warren, who during this long story had taken care to keep his pipe alight, and had, moreover, nearly drained the bottle of port placed before him, now declared himself ready to listen to his friend's confession. But Hermann had been saddened by all he had heard, and was in no humor for talking. He remarked that it was getting late, and proposed to postpone any further conversation till the morrow.

Warren merely answered, "Very well," knocked the ashes out of his pipe, shared out the remainder of the wine between his host and himself, and, raising his glass, said, in a somewhat solemn tone, "To our youth, Hermann!" After emptying his glass at one draught, he replaced it on the table, and said complacently, "It is long since I have drunk with so much pleasure; for this time I have not drunk to forgetfulness, but to memory."

II.
Warren spent another week in Leipzig with his friend. No man was easier to live with: to every suggestion of Hermann's he invariably answered, "Very well;" and if Hermann proposed nothing, he was quite content to remain seated in a comfortable arm-chair by the fireside, holding a book which he scarcely looked at, and watching the long rolls of smoke from his pipe. He disliked new acquaintances; nevertheless, the friends to whom Hermann introduced him found in him a quiet, unobtrusive, and well-informed companion. He pleased everybody. There was something strange and yet attractive in his person; there was a "charm" about him, people said. Hermann felt the attraction without being able to define in what it consisted. Their former

friendship had been renewed unreservedly. The kind of fascination that Warren exercised over all those who approached him often led Hermann to think that it was not unlikely that in his youth he had inspired a real love in Ellen Gilmore.

One evening Hermann took his friend to the theatre, where a comic piece was being performed. In his young days Warren had been very partial to plays of that kind, and his joyous peals of laughter on such occasions still rang in the ears of his friend. But the attempt was a complete failure. Warren watched the performance without showing the slightest interest, and never even smiled. During the opening scenes he listened with attention, as though he were assisting at some performance of the legitimate drama; then, as if he could not understand what was going on before his eyes, he turned away with a wearied air and began looking at the audience. When, at the close of the second act, Hermann proposed that they should leave the house, he answered readily:

"Yes, let us go; all this seems very stupid—we will be much better at home. There is a time for all things, and buffoonery suits me no longer."

There was nothing left in Warren of the friend that Hermann had known fifteen years before. He loved him none the less; on the contrary, to his affection for him had been superadded a feeling of deep compassion. He would have made great sacrifices to secure his friend's happiness, and to see a smile light up the immovable features and the sorrowful dulness of the eye. His friendly anxiety had not been lost upon Warren; and when the latter took his leave, he said with emotion:

"You wish me well, my old friend, I see it and feel it; and, believe me, I am grateful. We must not lose sight of each other again—I will write regularly."

A few days later, Hermann received a letter for his friend. It was an American letter, and the envelope was stamped with the initials "E. H." They were those of Ellen Howard, the heroine of Warren's sad history. He forwarded the letter immediately, and wrote at the same time to his friend: "I hope the inclosed brings you good news from America." But in his reply Warren took no notice of this passage, and made no allusion to Ellen. He only spoke of the new house in which he had just settled himself—"to end," as he said, "his days;" and he pressed Hermann to come and join him. The two friends at last agreed to pass

Christmas and New Year's Day together; but when December came, Warren urged his friend to hasten his arrival.

"I do not feel well," he wrote, "and am often so weary that I stay at home all day. I have made no new acquaintances, and, most likely, will make none. I am alone. Your society would give me great pleasure. Come; your room is ready, and will be, I trust, to your liking. There is a large writing table and tolerably well-filled book-shelves; you can write there quite at your ease, without fear of disturbance. Come as soon as possible, my dear friend. I am expecting you impatiently."

Hermann happened to be at leisure, and was able to comply with his friend's wish, and to go to him in the first week of December. He found Warren looking worn and depressed. It was in vain he sought to induce him to consult a physician. Warren would reply:

"Doctors can do nothing for my complaint. I know where the shoe pinches. A physician would order me probably to seek relaxation and amusement, just as he would advise a poor devil whose blood is impoverished by bad food to strengthen himself with a generous diet and good wine. The poor man could not afford to get the good living, and I do not know what could enliven or divert me. Travel? I like nothing so well as sitting quietly in my arm-chair. New faces? They would not interest me—yours is the only company I prefer to solitude. Books? I am too old to take pleasure in learning new things, and what I have learned has ceased to interest me. It is not always easy to get what might do one good, and we must take things as they are."

Hermann noticed, as before, that his friend ate little, but that, on the other hand, he drank a great deal. The sincere friendship he felt for him emboldened him to make a remark on the subject.

"It is true," said Warren, "I drink too much; but what can I do? Food is distasteful to me, and I must keep up my strength somehow. I am in a wretched state; my health is ruined."

One evening, as the two friends were seated together in Warren's room, while the wind and sleet were beating against the window-panes, the invalid began of his own accord to speak about Ellen.

"We now correspond regularly," he said. "She tells me in her last letter that she hopes soon to see me. Do you know, Hermann, that she is becoming an enigma for me? It is very evident that she does not treat me like other people, and I often wonder and ask myself what I am in

her eyes? What does she feel towards me? Love? That is inadmissible. Pity, perhaps? This then, is the end of my grand dreams—to be an object of pity? I have just answered her letter to say that I am settled here with the fixed intention of ending my useless existence in quiet and idleness. Do you remember a scene in Henry Heine's 'Reisebilder,' when a young student kisses a pretty girl, who lets him have his own way and makes no great resistance, because he has told her, 'I will be gone to-morrow at dawn, and I will never see you again'? The certainty of never seeing a person again gives a man the courage to say things that otherwise he would have kept hidden in the most secret depths of his being. I feel that my life is drawing to a close. Do not say no, my dear friend; my presentiments are certain. I have written it to Ellen. I have told her other things besides. What folly! All I have ever done has been folly or chimera. I end my life logically, in strict accordance with my whole Past, by making my first avowal of love on my deathbed. Is not that as useless a thing as can be?"

Hermann would have wished to know some particulars about this letter; but Warren replied, somewhat vaguely, "If I had a copy of my letter, I would show it to you willingly. You know my whole story, and I would not be ashamed to lay before you my last act of folly. I wrote about a fortnight ago, when I felt sure that death was drawing near. I was in a fever, not from fear—Death gains but little by taking my life—but from a singular species of excitement. I do not remember what were the words I used. Who knows? Perhaps this last product of my brain may have been quite a poetical performance. Never mind! I do not repent of what I have done; I am glad that Ellen should know at last that I have loved her silently and hopelessly. If that is not disinterested, what is?" he added with a bitter smile.

Christmas went by sadly. Warren was now so weak that he could scarcely leave his bed for two or three hours each day. Hermann had taken upon himself to send for a doctor, but this latter had scarcely known what to prescribe. Warren was suffering from no special malady; he was dying of exhaustion. Now and then, during a few moments, which became daily more rare and more brief, his vivacity would return; but the shadow of Death was already darkening his mind.

On New Year's Eve he got up very late. "We will welcome in the New Year," he said to Hermann. "I hope it may bring you happiness; I know it will bring me rest." A few minutes before midnight he opened the piano, and played with solemnity, and as if it had been a chorale, a song of Schumann's, entitled "To the Drinking-cup of a Departed

Friend." Then, on the first stroke of midnight, he filled two glasses with some old Rhenish wine, and raised his own glass slowly. He was very pale, and his eyes were shining with feverish light. He was in a state of strange and fearful excitement. He looked at the glass which he held, and repeated deliberately a verse of the song which he had just been playing. "The vulgar cannot understand what I see at the bottom of this cup." Then, at one draught, he drained the full glass.

While he was thus speaking and drinking, he had taken no notice of Hermann, who was watching him with consternation. Recovering himself at length, he exclaimed, "Another glass, Hermann! To friendship!" He drained this second glass, like the first, to the very last drop; and then, exhausted by the effort he had made, he sank heavily on a chair. Soon after, Hermann led him, like a sleepy child, to his bed.

During the days that followed, he was unable to leave his room; and the doctor thought it right to warn Hermann that all the symptoms seemed to point to a fatal issue.

On the 8th of January a servant from the hotel in the little neighboring town brought a letter, which, he said, required an immediate answer. The sick man was then lying almost unconscious. Hermann broke the seal without hesitation, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—A visit to Europe which my father had long planned has at last been undertaken. I did not mention it to you, in order to have the pleasure of surprising you. On reaching this place, I learn that the illness of which you spoke in your last letter has not yet left you. Under these circumstances, I will not venture to present myself without warning you of my arrival, and making sure that you are able to receive me. I am here with my brother, who, like myself, would not come so near to you without seeing you. My father has gone on to Paris, where Francis and I will join him in a few days. ELLEN."

Hermann, after one instant's thought, took up his hat and dismissed the messenger, saying he would give the answer himself. At the hotel he sent in his card, with the words, "From Mr. Warren," and was immediately ushered into Ellen's presence.

She was alone. Hermann examined her rapidly. He saw an extremely beautiful woman, whose frank and fearless eyes were fixed on him with a questioning look.

Hermann had not frequented the society of women much, and was

usually rather embarrassed in their presence. But on this occasion he thought only of his friend, and found no difficulty in explaining the motive of his visit. He told her his friend was ill—very ill—dying—and that he had opened the letter addressed to Warren. Ellen did not answer for some time; she seemed not to have understood what she had heard. After a while her eyes filled with tears, and she asked whether she could see Mr. Warren. On Hermann answering in the affirmative, she further inquired whether her brother might accompany her.

"Two visitors might fatigue the invalid too much," said Hermann; "your brother may come later."

"Are you not afraid that my visit may tire him?"

"I do not think so; it will make him very happy."

Ellen only took a few minutes to put on her hat and cloak, and they started. The short journey was accomplished in silence. When they reached the house, Hermann went in first to see how the dying man was. He was lying in his bed, in the delirium of fever, muttering incoherent sentences. Nevertheless he recognized Hermann, and asked for something to drink. After having allayed his thirst, he closed his eyes, as if to sleep.

"I have brought you a friend," said Hermann; "will you see him?"

"Hermann? He is always welcome."

"No; it is a friend from America."

"From America?...I lived there many years...How desolate and monotonous were the shores I visited!..."

"Will you see your friend?"

"I am carried away by the current of the river. In the distance I see dark and shadowy forms; there are hills full of shade and coolness...but I will never rest there."

Hermann retired noiselessly, and returned almost immediately with Ellen.

Warren, who had taken no notice of him, continued to follow the

course of his wandering thoughts.

"The river is drawing near to the sea. Already I can hear the roar of the waves...The banks are beginning to be clothed with verdure...The hills are drawing nearer....It is dark now. Here are the big trees beneath which I have dreamed so often. A radiant apparition shines through their foliage....It comes towards me... Ellen!"

She was standing beside the bed. The dying man saw her, and without showing the least surprise, said with a smile, "Thank God! you have come in time. I knew you were coming."

He murmured a few unintelligible words, and then remained silent for a long while. His eyes were wide open. Suddenly he cried, "Hermann!"

Hermann came and stood beside Ellen.

"The pendulum...You know what I mean?" A frank childish smile—the smile of his student days—lighted up his pallid face. He raised his right hand, and tracing in the air with his forefinger a wide semicircle, to imitate the oscillation of a pendulum, he said, "Then." He then figured in the same manner a more limited and slower movement, and after repeating it several times, said, "Now." Lastly, he pointed straight before him with a motionless and almost menacing finger, and said with a weak voice, "Soon."

He spoke no more, and closed his eyes. The breathing was becoming very difficult.

Ellen bent, over him, and called him softly, "Henry, Henry!" He opened his eyes. She brought her mouth close to his ear, and said, with a sob, "I have always loved you."

"I knew it from the first," he said, quietly and with confidence.

A gentle expression stole over his countenance, and life seemed to return. Once more he had the confident look of youth. A sad and beautiful smile played on his lips; he took the hand of Ellen in his, and kissed it gently.

"How do you feel now?" inquired Hermann.

The old answer, "Very well."

His hands were plucking at the bedclothes, as if he strove to cover his face with them. Then his arms stiffened and the fingers remained motionless.

"Very well," he repeated.

He appeared to fall into deep thought. There was a long pause. At last he turned a dying look, fraught with tender pity and sadness, towards Ellen, and in a low voice, which was scarcely audible, he said these two words, with a slight emphasis on the first—"PERFECTLY well."

The Vampire

By Jan Neruda. (1834-1891)

The excursion steamer brought us from Constantinople to the shore of the island of Prinkipo and we disembarked. The number of passengers was not large. There was one Polish family, a father, a mother, a daughter and her bridegroom, and then we two. Oh, yes, I must not forget that when we were already on the wooden bridge which crosses the Golden Horn to Constantinople, a Greek, a rather youthful man, joined us. He was probably an artist, judging by the portfolio he carried under his arm. Long black locks floated to his shoulders, his face was pale, and his black eyes were deeply set in their sockets. From the first moment he interested me, especially for his obligingness and for his knowledge of local conditions. But he talked too much, and I then turned away from him.

All the more agreeable was the Polish family. The father and mother were good-natured, fine people, the lover a handsome young fellow, of direct and refined manners. They had come to Prinkipo to spend the summer months for the sake of the daughter, who was slightly ailing. The beautiful pale girl was either just recovering from a severe illness or else a serious disease was just fastening its hold upon her. She leaned upon her lover when she walked and very often sat down to rest, while a frequent dry little cough interrupted her whispers. Whenever she coughed, her escort would considerably pause in their walk. He always cast upon her a glance of sympathetic suffering and she would look back at him as if she would say: "It is nothing. I am happy!" They believed in health and happiness.

On the recommendation of the Greek, who departed from us immediately at the pier, the family secured quarters in the hotel on the

hill. The hotel-keeper was a Frenchman and his entire building was equipped comfortably and artistically, according to the French style.

We breakfasted together and when the noon heat had abated somewhat we all betook ourselves to the heights, where in the grove of Siberian stone-pines we could refresh ourselves with the view. Hardly had we found a suitable spot and settled ourselves when the Greek appeared again. He greeted us lightly, looked about and seated himself only a few steps from us. He opened his portfolio and began to sketch.

"I think he purposely sits with his back to the rocks so that we can't look at his sketch," I said.

"We don't have to," said the young Pole. "We have enough before us to look at." After a while he added, "It seems to me he's sketching us in as a sort of background. Well--let him!"

We truly did have enough to gaze at. There is not a more beautiful or more happy corner in the world than that very Prinkipo! The political martyr, Irene, contemporary of Charles the Great, lived there for a month as an exile. If I could live a month of my life there I would be happy for the memory of it for the rest of my days! I shall never forget even that one day spent at Prinkipo.

The air was as clear as a diamond, so soft, so caressing, that one's whole soul swung out upon it into the distance. At the right beyond the sea projected the brown Asiatic summits; to the left in the distance purpled the steep coasts of Europe. The neighboring Chalki, one of the nine islands of the "Prince's Archipelago," rose with its cypress forests into the peaceful heights like a sorrowful dream, crowned by a great structure--an asylum for those whose minds are sick.

The Sea of Marmora was but slightly ruffled and played in all colors like a sparkling opal. In the distance the sea was as white as milk, then rosy, between the two islands a glowing orange and below us it was beautifully greenish blue, like a transparent sapphire. It was resplendent in its own beauty. Nowhere were there any large ships--only two small craft flying the English flag sped along the shore. One was a steamboat as big as a watchman's booth, the second had about twelve oarsmen, and when their oars rose simultaneously molten silver dripped from them. Trustful dolphins darted in and out among them and dove with long, arching flights above the surface of the water. Through the blue heavens now and then calm eagles winged their

way, measuring the space between two continents.

The entire slope below us was covered with blossoming roses whose fragrance filled the air. From the coffee-house near the sea music was carried up to us through the clear air, hushed somewhat by the distance.

The effect was enchanting. We all sat silent and steeped our souls completely in the picture of paradise. The young Polish girl lay on the grass with her head supported on the bosom of her lover. The pale oval of her delicate face was slightly tinged with soft color, and from her blue eyes tears suddenly gushed forth. The lover understood, bent down and kissed tear after tear. Her mother also was moved to tears, and I--even I--felt a strange twinge.

"Here mind and body both must get well," whispered the girl. "How happy a land this is!"

"God knows I haven't any enemies, but if I had I would forgive them here!" said the father in a trembling voice.

And again we became silent. We were all in such a wonderful mood--so unspeakably sweet it all was! Each felt for himself a whole world of happiness and each one would have shared his happiness with the whole world. All felt the same--and so no one disturbed another. We had scarcely even noticed the Greek, after an hour or so, had arisen, folded his portfolio and with a slight nod had taken his departure. We remained.

Finally after several hours, when the distance was becoming overspread with a darker violet, so magically beautiful in the south, the mother reminded us it was time to depart. We arose and walked down towards the hotel with the easy, elastic steps that characterize carefree children. We sat down in the hotel under the handsome veranda.

Hardly had we been seated when we heard below the sounds of quarreling and oaths. Our Greek was wrangling the hotel-keeper, and for the entertainment of it we listened.

The amusement did not last long. "If I didn't have other guests," growled the hotel-keeper, and ascended the steps towards us.

"I beg you to tell me, sir," asked the young Pole of the approaching hotel-keeper, "who is that gentleman? What's his name?"

"Eh--who knows what the fellow's name is?" grumbled the hotel-keeper, and he gazed venomously downwards. "We call him the ."

"An artist?"

"Fine trade! He sketches only corpses. Just as soon as someone in Constantinople or here in the neighborhood dies, that very day he has a picture of the dead one completed. That fellow paints them beforehand--and he never makes a mistake--just like a vulture!"

The old Polish woman shrieked affrightedly. In her arms lay her daughter pale as chalk. She had fainted.

In one bound the lover had leaped down the steps. With one hand he seized the Greek and with the other reached for the portfolio.

We ran down after him. Both men were rolling in the sand. The contents of the portfolio were scattered all about. On one sheet, sketched with a crayon, was the head of the young Polish girl, her eyes closed and a wreath of myrtle on her brow.

The Chess Player

By K. Sterling. (1979)

Theodore "Theo" Hartley lived in the center of New York City, surrounded by towering skyscrapers and the constant hum of city life. Theo was no ordinary city resident; he was a chess player, and not just any chess player—he was a master of the game. His passion for chess was renowned, and it devoured every waking hour of his life.

Theo's apartment was a shrine to the game. Chessboards of various sizes and materials adorned every surface, and bookshelves groaned under the weight of strategy guides and historical accounts of famous matches. Theo spent hours each day studying openings, endgames, and the intricate dance of pieces across the board. His mind was a labyrinth of strategies, a testament to his unwavering dedication. He loved to play against himself.

One evening, as Theo sat in his favorite armchair, engrossed in a particularly challenging game, his old friend, Henry, stopped by. Henry, a man of wisdom and experience, had known Theo since their college days and was one of the few people who understood the depth of Theo's obsession.

"Theo, you're still at it, I see," Henry said, looking at the chessboard with a mixture of admiration and concern.

Theo looked up, his eyes gleaming with intensity. "Henry, you know how it is. Chess is more than just a game. It's a reflection of life itself."

Henry nodded, taking a seat across from Theo. "I understand your passion, Theo, but don't you think you're taking it too far? You've been neglecting your work, your friends, even your own health."

Theo waved a dismissive hand. "Chess requires sacrifice, Henry. Just like life. You have to make tough decisions, weigh the consequences, and sometimes, you have to let go of things to achieve your goal."

Henry sighed, his eyes filled with worry. "But at what cost, Theo? You're losing touch with the world around you. Chess is just a game, after all."

Theo's eyes narrowed, and he leaned forward, his voice filled with

conviction. "Chess is not just a game, Henry. It's a metaphor for life. Every move you make has consequences. Every piece you sacrifice is a choice you make. It's about strategy, patience, and understanding the bigger picture."

Henry shook his head. "I understand your point, Theo, but you're missing the bigger picture here. Life is about balance. You can't let one thing consume you entirely."

Theo fell silent, his gaze returning to the chessboard. He knew Henry was right, but he couldn't shake off the allure of the game. It was his escape, his solace, and his obsession.

Days turned into weeks, and Theo's obsession only grew stronger. He began to miss deadlines at work, his relationships with friends and family became strained, and his health started to deteriorate. His once vibrant eyes were now sunken, and his skin had taken on a pale, unhealthy pallor.

One day, Theo's boss, Mr. Thompson, called him into his office. Mr. Thompson was a stern man, known for his no-nonsense approach to business. He looked at Theo with a mixture of disappointment and concern.

"Theo, I've noticed a significant decline in your performance lately," Mr. Thompson said, his voice firm. "You've been missing deadlines, and your work has been subpar. What's going on?"

Theo shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "I've been a bit preoccupied, sir. Chess has been taking up a lot of my time."

Mr. Thompson's eyebrows shot up. "Chess? Theo, this is your career we're talking about. You can't let a game interfere with your responsibilities."

Theo felt a pang of guilt, but his obsession was too strong to ignore. "I understand, sir. I'll try to do better."

Mr. Thompson sighed, his expression softening slightly. "Theo, I'm not just saying this as your boss. I'm saying this as someone who cares about your well-being. You need to find a balance. Chess is important to you, I get that, but it can't be the only thing in your life."

Theo left the office feeling conflicted. He knew Mr. Thompson was

right, but the allure of the chessboard was too strong to resist. He found himself drawn back to the game, unable to break free from its grip.

One evening, as Theo sat alone in his apartment, engrossed in a particularly challenging game, he felt a sudden pain in his chest. He clutched at his heart, his breath coming in short, ragged gasps. The room spun around him, and he collapsed onto the floor, the chess pieces scattering around him.

When Theo woke up, he found himself in a hospital bed. The sterile white walls and the beeping of machines were a stark contrast to the familiar comfort of his chess-filled apartment. Henry sat by his side, his face etched with worry.

"Theo, you gave us quite a scare," Henry said, his voice filled with concern. "The doctor said it was a mild heart attack. You've been pushing yourself too hard."

Theo looked at Henry, his eyes filled with a newfound clarity. "I think I finally understand, Henry. I've been so consumed by chess that I forgot about everything else. I forgot about my health, my friends, my responsibilities."

Henry nodded, a small smile playing on his lips. "It's not too late to change, Theo. You can still find a balance. Chess can be a part of your life, but it can't be your whole life."

Theo took a deep breath, his mind made up. "You're right, Henry. I need to find a balance. I need to remember that life is more than just a game of chess."

Over the next few weeks, Theo made a conscious effort to change his ways. He still played chess, but with a newfound sense of moderation. He reconnected with his friends, focused on his work, and took care of his health. He found that by balancing his passion for chess with his responsibilities, he was able to enjoy the game even more.

One day, as Theo sat in his apartment, playing a leisurely game of chess with Henry, he looked up and smiled. "You know, Henry, chess really is a metaphor for life. It's about making choices, weighing the consequences, and finding a balance. But it's also about enjoying the journey, not just the destination."

Henry smiled back, his eyes filled with pride. "I'm glad you finally understand, Theo. Life is a game of chess, but it's also so much more. It's about the people you meet, the experiences you have, and the lessons you learn along the way."

Theo nodded, his gaze returning to the chessboard. He knew that he had a long road ahead of him, but he was ready to face the challenges that life threw his way. He had learned the importance of balance, and he was determined to live his life to the fullest, both on and off the chessboard.

II

Years later, Theo became a renowned chess coach, teaching young players the strategies and techniques he had mastered. He never forgot the lessons he learned from his obsession and made sure to impart the importance of balance to his students. As he looked back on his journey, Theo realized that his obsession had been a double-edged sword—it had brought him great success, but also great hardship.

In the end, Theo emerged wiser, his passion for chess still burning bright, but tempered by a deeper understanding of the world and his place in it. He found harmony between his love for the game and the complexities of life, using the metaphor of chess to navigate the challenges and uncertainties that life often demands.

Through his journey, Theo learned that life, like chess, is a game of strategy, patience, and sacrifice. But it is also a game of balance, of finding the middle ground between passion and responsibility, between intellect and emotion. And in that balance, Theo found true happiness and fulfillment.

The Cask of Amontillado

By Edgar Allan Poe. (1809-1849)

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled — but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation.

He had a weak point — this Fortunato — although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially; — I was skilful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him — “My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day! But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts.”

“How?” said he. “Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle

of the carnival!"

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi. If any one has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me ——"

"Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from Sherry."

"And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Whither?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi ——"

"I have no engagement; — come."

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre."

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a roquelaire closely about my person, I

suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

“The pipe,” said he.

“It is farther on,” said I; “but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls.”

He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication .

“Nitre?” he asked, at length.

“Nitre,” I replied. “How long have you had that cough?”

“Ugh! ugh! ugh! — ugh! ugh! ugh! — ugh! ugh! ugh! — ugh! ugh! ugh! — ugh! ugh! ugh!”

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi ——”

"Enough," he said; "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True — true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily — but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damp."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"I drink," he said, "to the buried that repose around us."

"And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

"These vaults," he said, "are extensive."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great and numerous family."

"I forget your arms."

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel."

"And the motto?"

"Nemo me impune lacessit."

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The nitre!" I said: "see, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle

among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough
_____”

“It is nothing,” he said; “let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc.”

I broke and reached him a flacon of De Grève. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement — a grotesque one.

“You do not comprehend?” he said.

“Not I,” I replied.

“Then you are not of the brotherhood.”

“How?”

“You are not of the masons.”

“Yes, yes,” I said; “yes, yes.”

“You? Impossible! A mason?”

“A mason,” I replied.

“A sign,” he said.

“It is this,” I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my roquelaire.

“You jest,” he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. “But let us proceed to the Amontillado.”

“Be it so,” I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavoured to pry into the depths of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

“Proceed,” I said; “herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi ——”

“He is an ignoramus,” interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

“Pass your hand,” I said, “over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I will positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.”

“The Amontillado!” ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

“True,” I replied; “the Amontillado.”

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the

niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of my masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within.

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated, I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I re-echoed — I aided — I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognising as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said —

“Ha! ha! ha! — he! he! he! — a very good joke, indeed — an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo — he! he! he! — over our wine — he! he! he!”

“The Amontillado!” I said.

“He! he! he! — he! he! he! — yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo — the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“For the love of God, Montresor!”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud —

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again —

“Fortunato!” No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick — on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!

The Signal

By Vsevolod Garshin. (1855-1888)

Translated by Lizzie B. Gorin.

Semen Ivanov served as trackman on the railroad. His watch-house was twelve versts (nearly eight miles) distant from one station and ten from the other. The year before a large weaving mill had been established about four versts away; and its tall chimneys looked black from behind the trees of the wood; and nearer than this, apart from the other watch-houses, there was no human habitation.

Semen Ivanov was a sickly, broken-down man. Nine years before he had gone to the war: he served as orderly to an officer and had remained with him during the whole campaign. He starved and froze, and baked in the hot sun, and marched from forty to fifty versts in the frost or in the burning heat. It also happened that he was often under fire, but, thank God, no bullet ever touched him.

Once his regiment was in the first line; for a whole week the firing was kept up constantly on both sides: the Russian line on this side of the

hollow and the Turkish lines just across, and from morning till night the firing was going on. Semen's officer was also in the front lines, and three times a day, from the regiment kitchens in the hollow, Semen carried the hot samovar and the food. Semen walked through the open space while the bullets whistled over his head and cracked the stones. Semen was afraid, but he went on—wept, and went on. The officers were very much satisfied with Semen's services: the officers always had their hot tea.

Semen returned from the war without a wound, but with a rheumatic pain in his legs and arms. And he had suffered a good deal of sorrow since that time. His old father died soon after his return, then his little son—a boy of four—also died from some throat trouble; and Semen was left alone in the world with his wife.

Their work on the little piece of land allotted to them also proved unsuccessful, it being too hard for a man to till the soil with swollen arms and legs. And so they could not get along in their native village, and decided to go into new places in search of better luck. Semen lived with his wife on the Done for some time, and in the Government of Cherson; but they somehow could not get along very well anywhere. At last his wife went into service, and Semen continued his roving life as heretofore.

Once he happened to go by rail, and on one station he noticed the station-master, who seemed rather familiar to him. Semen looked at him intently, and the station-master also peered into Semen's face. They recognized each other: it was an officer of his regiment. "Is it you, Ivanov?" said the man.

"Yes, your honor, my very self."

"How did you get here?" And so Semen told him: such and such were the circumstances.

"Well, where are you going now?"

"I can not say, your honor."

"How is that, you fool, you can not say?"

"Just so, your honor, because I have nowhere to go to. I must look for some kind of employment, your honor."

And the station-master looked at him for a moment and fell to thinking, then he said to him: "Well, brother, stay here on the station in the mean time. But it seems to me that you are a married man? Where is your wife?"

"Yes, sir, I am married; my wife is serving at the house of a merchant at Kursk."

"Well, then, write to your wife to come here. I shall get a free ticket for her. We will soon have a vacant watch-house here, and I will ask the division-master to give you the place."

"Many thanks, your honor," replied Semen.

And so he remained on the station, helping in the station-master's kitchen, cutting wood, sweeping the courtyard and the railway platform. In two weeks his wife arrived, and Semen went on a hand-car to his new home.

The watch-house was new and warm, wood he had in plenty, the former watchman left a small garden, and there was a little less than one and a half acres of arable land on the two sides of the railroad-bed. Semen was overjoyed: he began to dream of a little homestead of his own, and of buying a horse and a cow.

He was given all the necessary supplies: a green flag, a red flag, lanterns, a signal-pipe, a hammer, a rail-key for tightening the screw-nuts, a crowbar, shovel, brooms, clinch-nails, bolts, and two books with the rules and regulations of the railroad. At first Semen did not sleep at night, for he continually repeated the regulations. If the train was due in two hours, he had already gone his rounds, and would sit on the little bench at the watch-house and look and listen: were not the rails trembling, was there no noise of an approaching train?

At last he learned by heart all the rules; though he read with difficulty and had to spell out each word, nevertheless he did learn them by heart.

This happened in summer: the work was not hard, there was no snow to shovel, and, besides, the trains passed but rarely on that road. Semen would walk over his verst twice in twenty-four hours, would tighten a screw here and there, pick up a splinter, examine the water-pipes, and go home to take care of his little homestead. The only thing that bothered him and his wife was: no matter what they made up their

minds to do, they had to ask the permission of the track-master, who again had to lay the matter before the division-master, and when permission was at last given the time had already passed, and it was then too late to be of any use to them. On account of this, Semen and his wife began, at times, to feel very lonely.

About two months passed in this way; Semen began to form acquaintance with his nearest neighbors—trackmen like himself. One was already a very old man, whom the railway authorities had long intended to replace; he could hardly move from his watch-house, and his wife attended to his duties. The other trackman, who lived nearer to the station, was still a young man, thin and sinewy. Semen met him for the first time on the railroad-bed half-way between their watch-houses, while they were making their rounds; Semen took off his cap and bowed. "Good health to you, neighbor," he said.

The neighbor looked at him askance. "How are you?" he replied, turned, and went his way.

The women also met afterward. Arina, Semen's wife, greeted her neighbor affably, but this neighbor, also not of the talkative kind, spoke a few words and walked away. On meeting her once, Semen asked:

"Why is your husband so uncommunicative, young woman?" After standing for some time in silence, she said: "But what should he talk to you about? Everybody has his troubles—God speed you."

But after another month had passed, their intimacy grew. Now, when Semen and Vasili met on the road-bed, they sat down on the edge, smoked their pipes, and told each other of their past life and experiences. Vasili spoke but little, but Semen told of his campaign life and of his native village.

"I have seen plenty of sorrow in my time, and God knows I am not so very old either. God has not given us much luck. It just depends: the kind of a lot the dear Lord portions out to one—such he must have. This is the way I make it out, Vasili Stepanich, little brother."

And Vasili struck the bowl of his pipe on the rail to empty it, and said:

"It isn't luck nor fate which is eating your life and mine away, but people. There is not a beast more cruel and rapacious than man. A wolf does not devour a wolf—but man eats man alive."

"Well, brother, wolf does eat wolf—that is where you are wrong."

"It came to my tongue, so I said it; anyhow there is not a more cruel beast. If it were not for man's viciousness and greed—'twould be possible to live. Every one is on the lookout to grasp at your vitals, tear off a piece, and gobble it up."

"I don't know, brother," said Semen after thinking a bit. "Maybe it is so—but if it is really so, then the great God ordained it in this way."

"And if it is so," spoke Vasili, "then there is no use of my speaking to you. A man who attributes to God every kind of iniquity, and himself sits and patiently bears it, can not be a man, brother mine—but an animal. Here you have my whole say!"

And he turned and went off without even saying good-by. Semen rose also and called after him; "Neighbor, and what are you abusing me for?"

But the neighbor did not even turn around, and went his way.

Semen looked after him till he was lost from sight at the turn of the road, then he returned home and said to his wife: "Well, Arina, what a venomous man that neighbor of ours is!"

Nevertheless they were not angry with each other; and when they met again they spoke as if nothing had happened and on the very same topic.

"Ei, brother, if not for the people—we would not sit here in these watch-houses," spoke Vasili.

"Well, what if we do live in a watch-house? It is not so bad to live in one, after all."

"Not so bad to live, not so bad—Ech, you! You lived long, but gained little; looked at much, but saw little. A poor man, no matter where he lives, in a railway watch-house or in any other place, what sort of a life is his? Those fleecers are eating your life away, squeeze all your juice out, and when you have grown old they throw you out like some swill, for the pigs to feed on. How much wages do you get?"

"Well, not much, Vasili Stepanich, twelve rubles" (about seven dollars and a half).

"And I thirteen and a half. Allow me to ask you why! According to the rulings of the administration, every one of us is supposed to get the same amount—fifteen rubles a month, and light and heat. Who was it that allotted you and me twelve, or say, thirteen and a half rubles? Allow me to ask you?—And you say it is not so bad a life? Understand me well, it is not about the three or one and a half rubles I am wrangling about—but even if they paid me the whole amount— Last month I was at the station when the director happened to pass. I saw him there. Had the honor. He occupied a whole private car by himself—on the station he alighted and stood on the platform, looking—no, I will not stay here long; I shall go where my eyes will lead me."

"But where will you go, Stepanich? Let well alone, you will not find it much better anywhere. You have a home here, warmth, and a bit of land. Your wife is an able workwoman—"

"Land! You ought to see the land I have—why, there isn't a stick on it. This spring I planted some cabbages. Well, one day the track-master passed: 'What is this?' he says. 'Why did you not report it? Why not have waited for permission? Dig it out at once and not a vestige should be left of it.' He was in his cups. At another time he would not have said a word, and here he got it into his head— Three rubles fine!—"

For some moments Vasili pulled at his pipe in silence, then he said in a low voice: "It wanted but little more, and I would have made short work of him."

"Well, neighbor, you are a hot-head, I can tell you."

"I am not hot, I am only speaking and considering everything from the point of justice. But he will get it from me yet, the red-mug; I shall make a complaint to the master of the division in person. We shall see!"

And he really complained.

Once the master of the division came to make a preliminary inspection of the road. In three days' time very important gentlemen were expected from St. Petersburg to make an inspection of the road: everything had to be made ship-shape; some new gravel was ordered before their arrival, added, leveled, and smoothed out, the sleepers were examined, the nuts tightened, the verst-posts newly painted, and the order was given that some fine yellow sand be strewn over the crossings. A track-woman even drove her old man out of the nearest

watch-house, which he almost never left, in order to trim a little the tiny grass-plot. Semen worked a whole week to bring everything into first-rate order, even mended his coat and burnished his brass shield till it shone. Vasili also worked hard.

At last the division master arrived in a buzzing draisine (hand car), worked by four men and making twenty versts an hour. It came flying toward Semen's watch-house, and Semen sprang forward and reported in military fashion. Everything appeared to be correct.

"Are you long here?" asked the master.

"Since the second of May, your honor."

"Very well, thank you. And who is at Number 164?"

The track-master who rode with him on the draisine replied: "Vasili Spiridov."

"Spiridov, Spiridov— Oh, the one you reported?"

"The very same."

"Very well, let us have a look at Vasili Spiridov. Go ahead."

The workmen leaned upon the handles and the draisine flew farther. "There will be a fight between them and the neighbor," thought Semen, looking after the disappearing draisine.

About two hours later Semen went on his rounds. He saw that some one was coming toward him, walking over the railroad bed, and there was something white visible on his head. Semen strained his eyes to see who it was—Vasili; in his hand he carried a stick and a small bundle was slung across his shoulders, and one cheek was tied up with a white kerchief.

"Where are you going, neighbor?" Semen shouted to him.

When Vasili approached him closer, Semen saw that he was as pale as chalk and wild-eyed; and when he started to speak his voice broke.

"I am off to the city," he said, "to Moscow—to the main office of the administration."

"To the administration— Is that it! You are going to make a complaint, are you? Better not, Vasili Stepanich, forget it—"

"No, brother, I will not forget it. It is too late to forget. You see, he struck me in the face, beat me till the blood flowed. As long as I live, I will not forget it, nor let it go at this."

"Give it up, Stepanich," Semen spoke to him, taking hold of his hand. "I speak truth: you will not make things better."

"Who speaks of better! I know myself that I will not make them better; you spoke truly about fate—you did. I shall not do much good to myself, but one has to stand up for justice."

"But won't you tell me how it all came about?"

"How it all came about— Well, he inspected everything, left the draisine on purpose to do so—even looked inside the watch-house. I knew beforehand that he would be strict—so I had everything in class order. He was already going to leave when I came forward with my complaint. He immediately burst forth: 'Here,' he said, 'is to be a government inspection, you—so and so—and you dare come forward with your complaints about your vegetable garden! We are expecting privy councilors and he comes with his cabbages!' I could not control myself and said a word—not so very bad either, but it seemed to offend him and he struck me— And I stood there, as if it was the most usual thing in the world to happen. Only, when they went off, I came to my senses, washed off the blood from my face and went away."

"And what about the watch-house?"

"My wife is there, she will take care; and besides, the devil take their road, anyway!"

"Good-by, Ivanich," he said to Semen on taking leave of him; "I don't know if I shall find justice for myself."

"You don't mean to tell me that you will go on foot?"

"I shall ask them at the station to let me ride in a freighter; to-morrow I shall be in Moscow."

The neighbors took leave of each other and each went his way. Vasili stayed away for a long time. His wife did all the work for him, sleeping

neither night nor day, and looked very worn and exhausted. On the third day the inspectors passed: an engine, freight-car, and two private cars, and Vasili was still absent. On the fourth day Semen saw Vasili's wife; her face was swollen with incessant weeping and her eyes were very red. "Has your husband returned?" he asked her. She only waved her arm, but did not utter a word.

When still a little boy Semen had learned how to make willow pipes. He burnt out the pith, drilled out where necessary the tiny finger-holes, and finished up the end of the pipe so artistically that almost anything could be played on it. At odd moments he now made lots of such pipes and sent them with an acquaintance of his, a freight conductor, to the city, where they were sold at two copecks[1] a pipe. On the third day after the inspection he left his wife at home to meet the six o'clock train, took his knife and went into the woods to cut his willow sticks. He came to the end of his section, where the road made a sharp turn, descended the embankment and went up the hill. About a half verst farther was a large bog, around which grew splendid shrubs for his pipes. He cut a whole heap of sticks and went home, again walking through the wood. The sun was already low; and a deathlike quiet reigned all about, only the chirping of the birds could be heard and the crackling underfoot of the wind-fallen wood. A little more and he would reach the railroad bed; suddenly it seemed to him as if he heard coming from somewhere the clang of iron striking on iron. Semen hurried his steps. "What can it be?" he asked himself, knowing that no repairs were going on in that section at that time. He reached the edge of the wood—before him rose high the embankment of the railway; and he saw—on the top on the railroad bed—a man squatting down at work on something. Semen began to ascend the embankment very quietly, thinking that some one was trying to steal the screw-nuts. He saw the man rise; in his hand he held a crowbar; he quickly shoved the crowbar under the rail and gave it a push to one side—Semen felt everything grow dim; he tried to shout, but could not. He saw that it was Vasili, and made a dash for the embankment, but Vasili was already rolling down the other side of the embankment with the rail-key and crowbar.

"Vasili Stepanich! Little father, friend, come back! Give me the crowbar! Let us put the rail in place; no one will ever know. Come back, save your soul from a great sin!"

But Vasili did not even turn round, and went on into the woods.

Semen remained standing over the dislocated rail, his sticks lying in a

heap at his feet. The train which was due was not a freighter, but a passenger train, and he had nothing to stop it with: a flag he had none. He could not put the rail into its right place; with bare hands one can not fasten in the rail spikes. He had to run, run for dear life into his watch-house for the necessary implements! God give him strength!

And Semen started to run breathlessly toward his watch-house. He ran now,—now he would fall—at last he left the wood behind, he had only about seven hundred feet left to his watch-house suddenly he heard the factory whistle. Six o'clock, and at two minutes past six the train would pass. Great God! Save the innocent souls! And before his eyes he seemed to see how the left wheel of the engine would strike the cut rail, quiver, slant to one side, and tear the sleepers, knock them all to slivers, and just here—is the rounded curve, and the embankment—and the engine, the cars, all—would go pell-mell down, down from the height of seventy-seven feet, and the third-class cars were jammed full of people, little children among them. Now they were sitting tranquilly, not thinking of anything. O Lord, teach him what to do! No, he would not be able to get to the watch-house and return in time.

Semen gave up his intention of running to the watch-house, turned and ran back quicker than he had come, his head in a whirl; not knowing himself what would happen he ran up to the cut rail: his sticks lay scattered all around. He bent down and took one of the sticks, not understanding himself why he did it; and ran farther. And it seemed to him that the train was already approaching. He heard a far-away whistle, heard the rails begin to quiver measuredly and quietly: he had no more strength left to run. He stopped about seven hundred feet from the fatal spot: suddenly he became illuminated, as it were, by a thought.

He took off his hat, took from it a handkerchief; took out his knife from his boot-leg and crossed himself. God's blessing!

He slashed his left arm a little above the elbow with his sharp knife; the blood spurted down in a hot stream; he dipped his handkerchief in it, smoothed it out, tied it to his stick, and displayed his red flag.

He stood waving the flag; the train was already in sight. The engineer did not see him, he would come nearer, but at a distance of seven hundred feet he would not be able to stop the heavy train!

And the blood was pouring and pouring— Semen pressed his hand to his side, but the blood would not stop; evidently he had made too deep

a cut into the arm; his head was beginning to turn; he was getting dizzy, as if black flies were swimming in his eyes; then everything became altogether dark, and loud bells were ringing in his ears— He no longer saw the train, no longer heard the noise: only one thought predominated: "I will not be able to keep on my feet, will fall down, drop the flag; the train will pass over me?— Dear God, succor, send some one to relieve me—" His soul became a void, and he dropped the flag. But the bloody flag did not fall to the ground: some one's hand caught it and raised it aloft in front of the oncoming train. The engineer saw him and brought the engine to a stop.

The people came rushing from the train; soon they gathered into a crowd; before them lay a man, unconscious, covered with blood; another man stood beside him with a bloody rag tied to a stick.

Vasili surveyed the crowd and lowered his head.

Bind me," he said; "it was I who cut the rail."

A Passion In The Desert

By Honoré de Balzac. (1799-1850)

Translated by Ernest Dowson.

“The whole show is dreadful,” she cried coming out of the menagerie of M. Martin. She had just been looking at that daring speculator “working with his hyena,”—to speak in the style of the programme.

“By what means,” she continued, “can he have tamed these animals to such a point as to be certain of their affection for——”

“What seems to you a problem,” said I, interrupting, “is really quite natural.”

“Oh!” she cried, letting an incredulous smile wander over her lips.

“You think that beasts are wholly without passions?” I asked her.

“Quite the reverse; we can communicate to them all the vices arising in our own state of civilization.”

She looked at me with an air of astonishment.

“But,” I continued, “the first time I saw M. Martin, I admit, like you, I did give vent to an exclamation of surprise. I found myself next to an old soldier with the right leg amputated, who had come in with me. His face had struck me. He had one of those heroic heads, stamped with the seal of warfare, and on which the battles of Napoleon are written. Besides, he had that frank, good-humored expression which always impresses me favorably. He was without doubt one of those troopers who are surprised at nothing, who find matter for laughter in the contortions of a dying comrade, who bury or plunder him quite light-heartedly, who stand intrepidly in the way of bullets;—in fact, one of those men who waste no time in deliberation, and would not hesitate to make friends with the devil himself. After looking very attentively at the proprietor of the menagerie getting out of his box, my companion pursed up his lips with an air of mockery and contempt, with that peculiar and expressive twist which superior people assume to show

they are not taken in. Then, when I was expatiating on the courage of M. Martin, he smiled, shook his head knowingly, and said, 'Well known.'

"How 'well known'?" I said. 'If you would only explain me the mystery, I should be vastly obliged.'

"After a few minutes, during which we made acquaintance, we went to dine at the first restaurateur's whose shop caught our eye. At dessert a bottle of champagne completely refreshed and brightened up the memories of this odd old soldier. He told me his story, and I saw that he was right when he exclaimed, 'Well known.'"

When she got home, she teased me to that extent, was so charming, and made so many promises, that I consented to communicate to her the confidences of the old soldier. Next day she received the following episode of an epic which one might call "The French in Egypt."

During the expedition in Upper Egypt under General Desaix, a Provencal soldier fell into the hands of the Maugrabins, and was taken by these Arabs into the deserts beyond the falls of the Nile.

In order to place a sufficient distance between themselves and the French army, the Maugrabins made forced marches, and only halted when night was upon them. They camped round a well overshadowed by palm trees under which they had previously concealed a store of provisions. Not surmising that the notion of flight would occur to their prisoner, they contented themselves with binding his hands, and after eating a few dates, and giving provender to their horses, went to sleep.

When the brave Provencal saw that his enemies were no longer watching him, he made use of his teeth to steal a scimiter, fixed the blade between his knees, and cut the cords which prevented him from using his hands; in a moment he was free. He at once seized a rifle and a dagger, then taking the precautions to provide himself with a sack of dried dates, oats, and powder and shot, and to fasten a scimiter to his waist, he leaped on to a horse, and spurred on vigorously in the direction where he thought to find the French army. So impatient was he to see a bivouac again that he pressed on the already tired courser at such speed, that its flanks were lacerated with his spurs, and at last the poor animal died, leaving the Frenchman alone in the desert. After walking some time in the sand with all the courage of an escaped convict, the soldier was obliged to stop, as the day had already ended. In spite of the beauty of an Oriental sky at

night, he felt he had not strength enough to go on. Fortunately he had been able to find a small hill, on the summit of which a few palm trees shot up into the air; it was their verdure seen from afar which had brought hope and consolation to his heart. His fatigue was so great that he lay down upon a rock of granite, capriciously cut out like a camp-bed; there he fell asleep without taking any precaution to defend himself while he slept. He had made the sacrifice of his life. His last thought was one of regret. He repented having left the Maugrabs, whose nomadic life seemed to smile upon him now that he was far from them and without help. He was awakened by the sun, whose pitiless rays fell with all their force on the granite and produced an intolerable heat—for he had had the stupidity to place himself adversely to the shadow thrown by the verdant majestic heads of the palm trees. He looked at the solitary trees and shuddered—they reminded him of the graceful shafts crowned with foliage which characterize the Saracen columns in the cathedral of Arles.

But when, after counting the palm trees, he cast his eyes around him, the most horrible despair was infused into his soul. Before him stretched an ocean without limit. The dark sand of the desert spread further than eye could reach in every direction, and glittered like steel struck with bright light. It might have been a sea of looking-glass, or lakes melted together in a mirror. A fiery vapor carried up in surging waves made a perpetual whirlwind over the quivering land. The sky was lit with an Oriental splendor of insupportable purity, leaving naught for the imagination to desire. Heaven and earth were on fire.

The silence was awful in its wild and terrible majesty. Infinity, immensity, closed in upon the soul from every side. Not a cloud in the sky, not a breath in the air, not a flaw on the bosom of the sand, ever moving in diminutive waves; the horizon ended as at sea on a clear day, with one line of light, definite as the cut of a sword.

The Provençal threw his arms round the trunk of one of the palm trees, as though it were the body of a friend, and then, in the shelter of the thin, straight shadow that the palm cast upon the granite, he wept. Then sitting down he remained as he was, contemplating with profound sadness the implacable scene, which was all he had to look upon. He cried aloud, to measure the solitude. His voice, lost in the hollows of the hill, sounded faintly, and aroused no echo—the echo was in his own heart. The Provençal was twenty-two years old—he loaded his carbine.

"There'll be time enough," he said to himself, laying on the ground the

weapon which alone could bring him deliverance.

Viewing alternately the dark expanse of the desert and the blue expanse of the sky, the soldier dreamed of France—he smelled with delight the gutters of Paris—he remembered the towns through which he had passed, the faces of his comrades, the most minute details of his life. His Southern fancy soon showed him the stones of his beloved Provence, in the play of the heat which undulated above the wide expanse of the desert. Realizing the danger of this cruel mirage, he went down the opposite side of the hill to that by which he had come up the day before. The remains of a rug showed that this place of refuge had at one time been inhabited; at a short distance he saw some palm trees full of dates. Then the instinct which binds us to life awoke again in his heart. He hoped to live long enough to await the passing of some Maugrabins, or perhaps he might hear the sound of cannon; for at this time Bonaparte was traversing Egypt.

This thought gave him new life. The palm tree seemed to bend with the weight of the ripe fruit. He shook some of it down. When he tasted this unhopd-for manna, he felt sure that the palms had been cultivated by a former inhabitant—the savory, fresh meat of the dates were proof of the care of his predecessor. He passed suddenly from dark despair to an almost insane joy. He went up again to the top of the hill, and spent the rest of the day in cutting down one of the sterile palm trees, which the night before had served him for shelter. A vague memory made him think of the animals of the desert; and in case they might come to drink at the spring, visible from the base of the rocks but lost further down, he resolved to guard himself from their visits by placing a barrier at the entrance of his hermitage.

In spite of his diligence, and the strength which the fear of being devoured asleep gave him, he was unable to cut the palm in pieces, though he succeeded in cutting it down. At eventide the king of the desert fell; the sound of its fall resounded far and wide, like a sigh in the solitude; the soldier shuddered as though he had heard some voice predicting woe.

But like an heir who does not long bewail a deceased relative, he tore off from this beautiful tree the tall broad green leaves which are its poetic adornment, and used them to mend the mat on which he was to sleep.

Fatigued by the heat and his work, he fell asleep under the red curtains of his wet cave.

In the middle of the night his sleep was troubled by an extraordinary noise; he sat up, and the deep silence around allowed him to distinguish the alternative accents of a respiration whose savage energy could not belong to a human creature.

A profound terror, increased still further by the darkness, the silence, and his waking images, froze his heart within him. He almost felt his hair stand on end, when by straining his eyes to their utmost he perceived through the shadow two faint yellow lights. At first he attributed these lights to the reflections of his own pupils, but soon the vivid brilliance of the night aided him gradually to distinguish the objects around him in the cave, and he beheld a huge animal lying but two steps from him. Was it a lion, a tiger, or a crocodile?

The Provençal was not sufficiently educated to know under what species his enemy ought to be classed; but his fright was all the greater, as his ignorance led him to imagine all terrors at once; he endured a cruel torture, noting every variation of the breathing close to him without daring to make the slightest movement. An odor, pungent like that of a fox, but more penetrating, more profound,—so to speak,—filled the cave, and when the Provençal became sensible of this, his terror reached its height, for he could no longer doubt the proximity of a terrible companion, whose royal dwelling served him for a shelter.

Presently the reflection of the moon descending on the horizon lit up the den, rendering gradually visible and resplendent the spotted skin of a panther.

This lion of Egypt slept, curled up like a big dog, the peaceful possessor of a sumptuous niche at the gate of an hotel; its eyes opened for a moment and closed again; its face was turned towards the man. A thousand confused thoughts passed through the Frenchman's mind; first he thought of killing it with a bullet from his gun, but he saw there was not enough distance between them for him to take proper aim—the shot would miss the mark. And if it were to wake!—the thought made his limbs rigid. He listened to his own heart beating in the midst of the silence, and cursed the too violent pulsations which the flow of blood brought on, fearing to disturb that sleep which allowed him time to think of some means of escape.

Twice he placed his hand on his scimitar, intending to cut off the head of his enemy; but the difficulty of cutting the stiff short hair compelled him to abandon this daring project. To miss would be to die for

CERTAIN, he thought; he preferred the chances of fair fight, and made up his mind to wait till morning; the morning did not leave him long to wait.

He could now examine the panther at ease; its muzzle was smeared with blood.

“She’s had a good dinner,” he thought, without troubling himself as to whether her feast might have been on human flesh. “She won’t be hungry when she gets up.”

It was a female. The fur on her belly and flanks was glistening white; many small marks like velvet formed beautiful bracelets round her feet; her sinuous tail was also white, ending with black rings; the overpart of her dress, yellow like burnished gold, very lissome and soft, had the characteristic blotches in the form of rosettes, which distinguish the panther from every other feline species.

This tranquil and formidable hostess snored in an attitude as graceful as that of a cat lying on a cushion. Her blood-stained paws, nervous and well armed, were stretched out before her face, which rested upon them, and from which radiated her straight slender whiskers, like threads of silver.

If she had been like that in a cage, the Provencal would doubtless have admired the grace of the animal, and the vigorous contrasts of vivid color which gave her robe an imperial splendor; but just then his sight was troubled by her sinister appearance.

The presence of the panther, even asleep, could not fail to produce the effect which the magnetic eyes of the serpent are said to have on the nightingale.

For a moment the courage of the soldier began to fail before this danger, though no doubt it would have risen at the mouth of a cannon charged with shell. Nevertheless, a bold thought brought daylight to his soul and sealed up the source of the cold sweat which sprang forth on his brow. Like men driven to bay, who defy death and offer their body to the smiter, so he, seeing in this merely a tragic episode, resolved to play his part with honor to the last.

“The day before yesterday the Arabs would have killed me, perhaps,” he said; so considering himself as good as dead already, he waited bravely, with excited curiosity, the awakening of his enemy.

When the sun appeared, the panther suddenly opened her eyes; then she put out her paws with energy, as if to stretch them and get rid of cramp. At last she yawned, showing the formidable apparatus of her teeth and pointed tongue, rough as a file.

“A regular petite maitresse,” thought the Frenchman, seeing her roll herself about so softly and coquettishly. She licked off the blood which stained her paws and muzzle, and scratched her head with reiterated gestures full of prettiness. “All right, make a little toilet,” the Frenchman said to himself, beginning to recover his gaiety with his courage; “we’ll say good morning to each other presently;” and he seized the small, short dagger which he had taken from the Maugrabins.

At this moment the panther turned her head toward the man and looked at him fixedly without moving. The rigidity of her metallic eyes and their insupportable luster made him shudder, especially when the animal walked towards him. But he looked at her caressingly, staring into her eyes in order to magnetize her, and let her come quite close to him; then with a movement both gentle and amorous, as though he were caressing the most beautiful of women, he passed his hand over her whole body, from the head to the tail, scratching the flexible vertebrae which divided the panther’s yellow back. The animal waved her tail voluptuously, and her eyes grew gentle; and when for the third time the Frenchman accomplished this interesting flattery, she gave forth one of those purrings by which cats express their pleasure; but this murmur issued from a throat so powerful and so deep that it resounded through the cave like the last vibrations of an organ in a church. The man, understanding the importance of his caresses, redoubled them in such a way as to surprise and stupefy his imperious courtesan. When he felt sure of having extinguished the ferocity of his capricious companion, whose hunger had so fortunately been satisfied the day before, he got up to go out of the cave; the panther let him go out, but when he had reached the summit of the hill she sprang with the lightness of a sparrow hopping from twig to twig, and rubbed herself against his legs, putting up her back after the manner of all the race of cats. Then regarding her guest with eyes whose glare had softened a little, she gave vent to that wild cry which naturalists compare to the grating of a saw.

“She is exacting,” said the Frenchman, smilingly.

He was bold enough to play with her ears; he caressed her belly and scratched her head as hard as he could. When he saw that he was

successful, he tickled her skull with the point of his dagger, watching for the right moment to kill her, but the hardness of her bones made him tremble for his success.

The sultana of the desert showed herself gracious to her slave; she lifted her head, stretched out her neck and manifested her delight by the tranquility of her attitude. It suddenly occurred to the soldier that to kill this savage princess with one blow he must poniard her in the throat.

He raised the blade, when the panther, satisfied no doubt, laid herself gracefully at his feet, and cast up at him glances in which, in spite of their natural fierceness, was mingled confusedly a kind of good will. The poor Provençal ate his dates, leaning against one of the palm trees, and casting his eyes alternately on the desert in quest of some liberator and on his terrible companion to watch her uncertain clemency.

The panther looked at the place where the date stones fell, and every time that he threw one down her eyes expressed an incredible mistrust.

She examined the man with an almost commercial prudence. However, this examination was favorable to him, for when he had finished his meager meal she licked his boots with her powerful rough tongue, brushing off with marvelous skill the dust gathered in the creases.

“Ah, but when she’s really hungry!” thought the Frenchman. In spite of the shudder this thought caused him, the soldier began to measure curiously the proportions of the panther, certainly one of the most splendid specimens of its race. She was three feet high and four feet long without counting her tail; this powerful weapon, rounded like a cudgel, was nearly three feet long. The head, large as that of a lioness, was distinguished by a rare expression of refinement. The cold cruelty of a tiger was dominant, it was true, but there was also a vague resemblance to the face of a sensual woman. Indeed, the face of this solitary queen had something of the gaiety of a drunken Nero: she had satiated herself with blood, and she wanted to play.

The soldier tried if he might walk up and down, and the panther left him free, contenting herself with following him with her eyes, less like a faithful dog than a big Angora cat, observing everything and every movement of her master.

When he looked around, he saw, by the spring, the remains of his horse; the panther had dragged the carcass all that way; about two thirds of it had been devoured already. The sight reassured him.

It was easy to explain the panther's absence, and the respect she had had for him while he slept. The first piece of good luck emboldened him to tempt the future, and he conceived the wild hope of continuing on good terms with the panther during the entire day, neglecting no means of taming her, and remaining in her good graces.

He returned to her, and had the unspeakable joy of seeing her wag her tail with an almost imperceptible movement at his approach. He sat down then, without fear, by her side, and they began to play together; he took her paws and muzzle, pulled her ears, rolled her over on her back, stroked her warm, delicate flanks. She let him do what ever he liked, and when he began to stroke the hair on her feet she drew her claws in carefully.

The man, keeping the dagger in one hand, thought to plunge it into the belly of the too confiding panther, but he was afraid that he would be immediately strangled in her last convulsive struggle; besides, he felt in his heart a sort of remorse which bid him respect a creature that had done him no harm. He seemed to have found a friend, in a boundless desert; half unconsciously he thought of his first sweetheart, whom he had nicknamed "Mignonne" by way of contrast, because she was so atrociously jealous that all the time of their love he was in fear of the knife with which she had always threatened him.

This memory of his early days suggested to him the idea of making the young panther answer to this name, now that he began to admire with less terror her swiftness, suppleness, and softness. Toward the end of the day he had familiarized himself with his perilous position; he now almost liked the painfulness of it. At last his companion had got into the habit of looking up at him whenever he cried in a falsetto voice, "Mignonne."

At the setting of the sun Mignonne gave, several times running, a profound melancholy cry. "She's been well brought up," said the lighthearted soldier; "she says her prayers." But this mental joke only occurred to him when he noticed what a pacific attitude his companion remained in. "Come, ma petite blonde, I'll let you go to bed first," he said to her, counting on the activity of his own legs to run away as quickly as possible, directly she was asleep, and seek another shelter

for the night.

The soldier waited with impatience the hour of his flight, and when it had arrived he walked vigorously in the direction of the Nile; but hardly had he made a quarter of a league in the sand when he heard the panther bounding after him, crying with that saw-like cry more dreadful even than the sound of her leaping.

“Ah!” he said, “then she’s taken a fancy to me, she has never met anyone before, and it is really quite flattering to have her first love.” That instant the man fell into one of those movable quicksands so terrible to travelers and from which it is impossible to save oneself. Feeling himself caught, he gave a shriek of alarm; the panther seized him with her teeth by the collar, and, springing vigorously backwards, drew him as if by magic out of the whirling sand.

“Ah, Mignonne!” cried the soldier, caressing her enthusiastically; “we’re bound together for life and death but no jokes, mind!” and he retraced his steps.

From that time the desert seemed inhabited. It contained a being to whom the man could talk, and whose ferocity was rendered gentle by him, though he could not explain to himself the reason for their strange friendship. Great as was the soldier’s desire to stay upon guard, he slept.

On awakening he could not find Mignonne; he mounted the hill, and in the distance saw her springing toward him after the habit of these animals, who cannot run on account of the extreme flexibility of the vertebral column. Mignonne arrived, her jaws covered with blood; she received the wonted caress of her companion, showing with much purring how happy it made her. Her eyes, full of languor, turned still more gently than the day before toward the Provencal, who talked to her as one would to a tame animal.

“Ah! mademoiselle, you are a nice girl, aren’t you? Just look at that! So we like to be made much of, don’t we? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? So you have been eating some Arab or other, have you? That doesn’t matter. They’re animals just the same as you are; but don’t you take to eating Frenchmen, or I shan’t like you any longer.”

She played like a dog with its master, letting herself be rolled over, knocked about, and stroked, alternately; sometimes she herself would provoke the soldier, putting up her paw with a soliciting gesture.

Some days passed in this manner. This companionship permitted the Provençal to appreciate the sublime beauty of the desert; now that he had a living thing to think about, alternations of fear and quiet, and plenty to eat, his mind became filled with contrast and his life began to be diversified.

Solitude revealed to him all her secrets, and enveloped him in her delights. He discovered in the rising and setting of the sun sights unknown to the world. He knew what it was to tremble when he heard over his head the hiss of a bird's wing, so rarely did they pass, or when he saw the clouds, changing and many colored travelers, melt one into another. He studied in the night time the effect of the moon upon the ocean of sand, where the simoom made waves swift of movement and rapid in their change. He lived the life of the Eastern day, marveling at its wonderful pomp; then, after having reveled in the sight of a hurricane over the plain where the whirling sands made red, dry mists and death-bearing clouds, he would welcome the night with joy, for then felt the healthful freshness of the stars, and he listened to imaginary music in the skies. Then solitude taught him to unroll the treasures of dreams. He passed whole hours in remembering mere nothings, and comparing his present life with his past.

At last he grew passionately fond of the panther; for some sort of affection was a necessity.

Whether it was that his will powerfully projected had modified the character of his companion, or whether, because she found abundant food in her predatory excursions in the desert, she respected the man's life, he began to fear for it no longer, seeing her so well tamed.

He devoted the greater part of his time to sleep, but he was obliged to watch like a spider in its web that the moment of his deliverance might not escape him, if anyone should pass the line marked by the horizon. He had sacrificed his shirt to make a flag with, which he hung at the top of a palm tree, whose foliage he had torn off. Taught by necessity, he found the means of keeping it spread out, by fastening it with little sticks; for the wind might not be blowing at the moment when the passing traveler was looking through the desert.

It was during the long hours, when he had abandoned hope, that he amused himself with the panther. He had come to learn the different inflections of her voice, the expressions of her eyes; he had studied the capricious patterns of all the rosettes which marked the gold of her

robe. Mignonne was not even angry when he took hold of the tuft at the end of her tail to count her rings, those graceful ornaments which glittered in the sun like jewelry. It gave him pleasure to contemplate the supple, fine outlines of her form, the whiteness of her belly, the graceful pose of her head. But it was especially when she was playing that he felt most pleasure in looking at her; the agility and youthful lightness of her movements were a continual surprise to him; he wondered at the supple way in which she jumped and climbed, washed herself and arranged her fur, crouched down and prepared to spring. However rapid her spring might be, however slippery the stone she was on, she would always stop short at the word "Mignonne."

One day, in a bright midday sun, an enormous bird coursed through the air. The man left his panther to look at his new guest; but after waiting a moment the deserted sultana growled deeply.

"My goodness! I do believe she's jealous," he cried, seeing her eyes become hard again; "the soul of Virginie has passed into her body; that's certain."

The eagle disappeared into the air, while the soldier admired the curved contour of the panther.

But there was such youth and grace in her form! she was beautiful as a woman! the blond fur of her robe mingled well with the delicate tints of faint white which marked her flanks.

The profuse light cast down by the sun made this living gold, these russet markings, to burn in a way to give them an indefinable attraction.

The man and the panther looked at one another with a look full of meaning; the coquette quivered when she felt her friend stroke her head; her eyes flashed like lightning—then she shut them tightly.

"She has a soul," he said, looking at the stillness of this queen of the sands, golden like them, white like them, solitary and burning like them.

"Well," she said, "I have read your plea in favor of beasts; but how did two so well adapted to understand each other end?"

"Ah, well! you see, they ended as all great passions do end—by a misunderstanding. For some reason ONE suspects the other of

treason; they don't come to an explanation through pride, and quarrel and part from sheer obstinacy."

"Yet sometimes at the best moments a single word or a look is enough—but anyhow go on with your story."

"It's horribly difficult, but you will understand, after what the old villain told me over his champagne. He said—'I don't know if I hurt her, but she turned round, as if enraged, and with her sharp teeth caught hold of my leg—gently, I daresay; but I, thinking she would devour me, plunged my dagger into her throat. She rolled over, giving a cry that froze my heart; and I saw her dying, still looking at me without anger. I would have given all the world—my cross even, which I had not got then—to have brought her to life again. It was as though I had murdered a real person; and the soldiers who had seen my flag, and were come to my assistance, found me in tears.'

"'Well sir,' he said, after a moment of silence, 'since then I have been in war in Germany, in Spain, in Russia, in France; I've certainly carried my carcase about a good deal, but never have I seen anything like the desert. Ah! yes, it is very beautiful!'

"'What did you feel there?' I asked him.

"'Oh! that can't be described, young man! Besides, I am not always regretting my palm trees and my panther. I should have to be very melancholy for that. In the desert, you see, there is everything and nothing.'

"'Yes, but explain——'

"'Well,' he said, with an impatient gesture, 'it is God without mankind.'"

The Invisible Wound

By Károly Kisfaludy. (1788-1830)

Early one morning before the famous surgeon was even out of his bed he received an urgent caller who insisted that his case could not be postponed even for a minute; he demanded instant attention. The surgeon dressed hurriedly and rang for this valet.

“Let the patient come in,” he said.

The man who entered appeared to belong to the best class of society. His pale face and nervous demeanor betrayed physical suffering. His right hand was tied up in a sling and, although he could control his features, a painful groan escaped from his lips now and again.

“I haven’t been able to sleep for a week. There is some trouble with my right hand. I cannot make out what it is. It may be cancer or some other terrible disease. At first it did not bother me much, but lately it began to burn. I have not had a moment’s relief. It pains me terribly. The pain increases hourly, becoming more and more agonizing and unbearable. I have come to town to consult you. If I have to bear it another hour, I shall go mad. I want you to burn it out or cut it out. or do something with it.”

The surgeon reassured the patient by declaring that it was not perhaps necessary to operate.

“No, no”, the man insisted. “It will have to be operated on. I came purposely to have the disease part cut out. Nothing else can help.” He lifted his hand from the sling with considerable effort, and continued:

“I must ask you not be surprised if you do not see any visible wound on my hand. The case is quite unusual.

The doctor assured the patient that he was not in a habit of being

surprised at unusual things. Still after looking at it, he dropped the hand in sheer astonishment, for they seemed to be absolutely nothing that matter with it. It looked like any other hand; it was not even discolored. Yet it was evident that the man suffered terrible pains, for the way he caught his right hand with his left when the doctor let it fall, demonstrated that fact quite conclusively.

"Where does it hurt you?"

He pointed to a round spot between the two large veins, but matched the hand back when the physician cautiously touched the spot with the tip of his finger.

"Is that where it hurts?"

"Yes, Terribly."

"Do you feel the pressure when I place the finger on it?"

The man could not answer but the tears that came into his eyes told the story.

"It's extraordinary. I can see nothing."

"Neither do I, but the pain is still there and I would rather die than go on this way."

The surgeon examined it all over again, with a microscope, took the man's temperature, and finally shook his hand.

"The skin is perfectly healthy. The arteries are normal: not the slightest inflammation or swelling. It is as normal as any hand can be."

"I think it is a bit redder on the spot."

"Where?"

The stranger made a circle on the back of his hand about a size of a farthing. "Here."

The doctor looked at the man. He began to think that he had to deal with a lunatic.

"You will have to stay in town and I shall try to help you within the next few days." he said.

"I cannot wait a minute. Do not think, doctor, that I am insane, or under any delusion. This invisible wound hurts me terribly and I want you to cut out just that round part as far as the bone."

"I am not going to do it, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because there is nothing that matter with your hand. It is as healthy as my own."

"You seem to think that I am a madman, or that I am deceiving you," said the patient as he drew out his wallet a thousand-florin bank-note and placed it on the table. "You see I am in earnest. The matter is important enough for me to pay a thousand for it. Please perform the operation."

"If you offered me all the money in the world I would not touch a healthy limb with the operating knife."

"Because it would not be according to professional ethics. All the world would call you an idiot and would accuse me of taking advantage of your weakness, or declare that I could not diagnose a wound that did not exist."

"Very well, sir. Then I shall ask you another favor. I shall undertake the operation myself, though my left hand is rather clumsy at such things. All I would ask of you, is to take care of the wound after I operate it."

The surgeon saw with astonishment that the man was quite serious, and watched him take off his coat and turn up his shirt sleeve. The man even took out his pocket knife, for want of any other instrument. Before the doctor could intervene, the stranger had made a deep incision in his hand.

"Stop", he shouted, afraid lest the sufferer should sever a vein. "Since you believe it must be done, very well, I'll do it."

He then prepared for the operation. When it came to the actual cutting the doctor advised his patient to turn his head away, for people are generally upset at the sight of their own blood.

"Quite unnecessary," said the other. I must direct your hand so that you may know how far to cut."

The stranger took the operation stoically and was helpful with his directions. His hand never even trembled and when the round spot had been carved out he sighed a sign of happy relief, as if a load had been taken of his shoulders.

"You don't feel any pain now?" asked the surgeon.

"Not the least," he said with a smile. "It is as if the pain had been cut off and the slight irritation caused by the cutting seems like a cool breeze after a hot spell. Just let the blood run. It soothes me."

After the wound was bandaged, the stranger looked happy and contented. He was a changed man. He gratefully pressed the doctor's hand with his own left hand.

"I am very grateful to you, indeed."

The surgeon visited his patient at his hotel for several days after the operation and learned to respect the man, who occupied a high position in the country. He was learned and cultured, and was a member of one of the best families in the land.

After the wound was completely healed the stranger returned to his country home.

Three weeks later the patient again appeared at the surgeon's office. His hand was again in a sling and he complained of the same tormenting pain in the very spot where it hurt him before the operation. His face looked like wax, and cold perspiration glistened on his brow. He sank into an armchair, and without saying a word held out his right hand for the doctor to look at it.

“Good Lord, what has happened?”

“You didn’t cut it deep enough,” he groaned. “The pain returned; it is even worse than before. I am almost done for. I didn’t want to trouble you again, so I just bore it, but I can’t bear it any longer. You must operate it again.”

The surgeon examined the spot. The place where he had operated was quite healed, and covered with fresh skin. Not one of the veins seemed disturbed, the pulse was normal. There was no fever yet the man was trembling in every limb.

“I never experienced or heard anything like this before.”

There was nothing to be done but repeat the operation. Everything passed off as it had the first time. The pain stopped and though the patient experienced a great relief, this time failed to smile and when he thanked the doctor it was with sad and depressed expression.

“You needn’t be surprised if I am back again in a month,” he said as he took leave.

“You mustn’t think of it.”

“It is as sure there is God in heaven,” he said with an air of finality, “Au revoir.”

The surgeon discussed the case with several of his colleagues, each of whom expressed a different opinion. Not one could ever offer a satisfactory explanation. A month passed and the man did not appear. Another few weeks, and then instead of the patient, came a letter from his place of residence. The surgeon opened it with pleasure, thinking that the pain had not returned. The letter ran as follows:

“Dear doctor: I do not want to leave you in any doubt as to the origin of my trouble, and do not care to carry the secret of it into my grave, or perhaps elsewhere. I wish to acquaint you with the history of my terrible illness. It has returned three times now and do not intend to go on struggling against it any longer. I am only able to write this letter by placing a burning coal on the spot as an antidote against the hellish flames that burn it within.

“Six months ago I was a very happy man. I was rich and contented; I found pleasure in everything that appeals to a man of thirty-five, I buried a year ago. It was a love match. A very beautiful, kindly and cultured young lady was my wife. She had been a companion to Countries not far from my estate. She loved me and her heart was full of gratitude. For six months the time passed happily, each day bringing greater happiness than the last. She would walk miles along the highway to meet me when I had to go to the town and would not stay away even at the home of her former mistress, where she often visited, for more than a few hours. Her longing for me made the others of her party uncomfortable. She would never dance with another man, and would confess it as a great crime if she happened to dream of

someone else in her sleep. She was a lovely innocent child.

"I can't say what that brought me to the belief that this was but a pretense. Man is foolish enough to seek misery in the midst of his greatest happiness."

"She had small sewing table, the drawer of which she always kept locked. This began to torture me. I often noticed that she never left the key in the drawer and she never left it unlocked. What could she have to conceal so carefully? I became mad with jealousy. I did not believe her innocent eyes, her kisses and loving embraces. Perhaps all these were but a cunning deceit?"

"One day the Countess came to fetch her and manage to persuade her to spend the day at the castle. I promised that I should follow later in the afternoon. The carriage had scarcely pulled out of the yard when I began trying to open the drawer of the sewing table. One of the many keys I tried at last opened it. Rummaging among the many feminine effects under a folder of silk. I discovered a bundle of letters. One could recognize them at the first glance. They were of course love letters, tied together with a pink ribbon.

"I did not stop to consider that it was not honorable to commit such an indiscretion: looking for secrets of my wife's girlhood days! Something urged me to go on: perhaps they belonged to a later period--- since she had borne my name? I untied the ribbon and read the letters one after the other.

"It was the most terrible hour of my life."

"They revealed the most unpardonable treachery ever committed against a man. They were written by one of my most intimate friends. And their tone... They revealed the tenderest intimacy and deepest passion. How he urged her to secrecy. What he said about stupid husbands. How he advised her what to do to keep her husband in ignorance! Every one of them had been written after our marriage. And I thought I was happy. I don't want to describe my feelings. I drank my poison to the last drop. Then I folded the letters and returned them to their hiding-place, locking the drawer again.

"I knew that if I did not go to the castle she would return in the evening. That was precisely what happened. She sprang gaily out of the carriage and rushed to meet me on the porch, kissing and embracing me with the utmost tenderness. I pretended that nothing was amiss.

"We chatted, had supper together and went to bed as usual, each in our own room. I had at that time decided upon a course of action which I would carry out with the stubbornness of a maniac. What a miserable deception on the part of nature to endow sin with such an open face, I said to myself as I entered her room at midnight and looked at her beautiful innocent face as she slept. The poison had taken effect in my soul and had eaten itself through every vein of my body. I placed my

right hand silently on her neck and pressed it with all my might. For a moment she opened her eyes and looked at me astounded, then closed them again and died. She did not make a move in self-defense, but died as quietly as though she were in a dream. She bore no grudge against me even for killing her. One drop of blood oozed through her lips and dropped on my hand—you know the spot. I only noticed it in the morning after it was already dried. We buried her without much ado. I lived out of the country on a private estate and there was no controlling authority to investigate. Besides, no one would have thought anything about the matter, for the woman was my wife. She had no relations and had no friends, and there were no questions to answer. I purposely sent out notifications of her death after the funeral, in order to escape the importunities of other people. “I felt no pangs of conscience. I had been cruel, but she had deserved it. I did not hate her. I could easily forget her. No murderer committed his deed with more indifference than I did.

“When I arrived at the house, the Countess had just driven up. She was too late for the funeral, as I intended she should be. She was under a tremendous strain. The terror and the unexpectedness of the news almost dazed her. She spoke in a queer manner and I could not make out her meaning as she tried to console me. I didn’t listen to her with any interest, it is true, for I was in no need of consolation. Then she took hold of my hand in an intimate manner and said she would like to entrust a secret to me, adding that she would not take advantage of it.

“Then she said that she had entrusted a bundle of letters to my late wife; she could not possibly keep them at her own house owing to their peculiar character, and asked whether I would be good enough to return them to her. I felt a chill down my spine as I listened to her. With assumed calm I asked her what those contained? She trembled at the question and said:

“Your wife is the most faithful and loyal woman I ever met. She did not ask what they contained; she even gave me her word never to look into them.”

“Where did she keep the letters?”

“She said she kept them under lock and key in the drawer of her sewing table. They are tied with a pink ribbon. You would easily recognized them. Thirty letters in all.

“I took her to the room where the sewing table stood and opened the drawer. I took out the bundle and handed it to her.

“Are these the letters?”

“She reached out for them eagerly. I dared not raise my eyes for fear she might read something in them. She left soon afterward.

“Exactly one week after the burial a stinging pain visited the spot on

my hand where the drop of blood fell on that terrible night. The rest you know. I know it is nothing but auto-suggestion, but I cannot rid myself out of it. I am going to join her and will try to obtain her pardon. She will surely forgive me. She will love me just as she loved me when she lived. I thank you, Doctor, for all you have done for me."

The Gathering

By K. Sterling. (1979)

On a chilly autumn evening in London, five friends gathered at Aryan's house. Aryan, a devout Hindu, had asked Sam, Jake, Alex, and Tom over to watch "Bruce Almighty," a film about a man granted miraculous powers by God. The aroma of popcorn filled the air, and the television's mellow brightness formed shadows on the walls.

As the movie ended, the friends settled into a comfortable silence,

each lost in their own thoughts. Aryan, ever the religious one, broke the silence. "You know, I am a Hindu. My religion is Hinduism. I believe in the Almighty God, Brahma, the creator. Things happen because of Almighty Brahma."

Sam, always the skeptic, was quick to respond. "I don't think an almighty god exists. There are pieces of evidence for that. There are so many things that point to the contrary. We always pray to the almighty god, but he doesn't give us what we pray for. It's hard to believe an almighty god created the universe in perfect harmony when there's so much suffering and chaos."

Jake chimed in, "Exactly. Look at the world—there's so much pain and destruction. If an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving god exists, why would he allow this?"

Alex, who usually stayed neutral in such discussions, asked, "But what about reincarnation, NDEs, and karma? Do you believe in those?"

Sam nodded. "Yes, I believe in reincarnation, NDEs, and karma. There's scientific evidence for them. You should search on Google for 'scientific evidence for reincarnation, NDEs, and karma.' You'll find a lot of research and evidence."

Tom, who had been quietly listening, finally spoke up. "But if there's no almighty god, how do you explain the existence of these phenomena? And what about the problem of evil? If an almighty god exists, why is there so much suffering in the world?"

The discussion went on for hours, with each friend presenting their arguments and counterarguments. Aryan remained steadfast in his belief in Almighty Brahma the creator, while Sam and Jake continued to question the existence of an almighty god. Alex and Tom listened intently, occasionally interjecting with their own thoughts.

II

As the night wore on, the friends decided it was time to head home. They said their goodbyes and stepped out into the cool London night. Sam, feeling a bit unsettled by the discussion, walked alone, lost in thought.

As he turned a corner, he felt a sudden chill, as if an icy wind had blown through him. He looked around but saw no one. He quickened his pace, but the chill persisted. Suddenly, a figure materialized in front

of him—a ghostly apparition with a faint glow.

Sam stopped in his tracks, his heart pounding. The ghost spoke in a soft, ethereal voice. "You do not believe in an almighty god, do you?"

Sam, though terrified, managed to reply, "No, I don't. But who are you?"

The ghost smiled. "I am one of many. I am a ghost. I overheard your discussion. You are right to question the existence of an almighty god. But you must understand, there are different worlds—the ghost world, and millions of ghosts like myself. We exist, and we are part of the universe, just as you are."

Sam listened, his fear slowly giving way to curiosity. "But if there's no almighty god, who created the universe? Who created you?"

The ghost shook its head. "The universe is a complex web of existence and non-existence, creation and destruction. It is not the work of a single creator being but a result of countless interactions and natural forces. We ghosts are part of that web, just as you are."

Sam pondered this for a moment. "So, what about reincarnation, NDEs, and karma? Are they real?"

The ghost nodded. "Yes, they are real. They are part of the natural order of things, part of the cycle of life and death. But they do not require an almighty god to exist. They are simply aspects of the universe, just as gravity and time are."

The ghost continued, "You must understand, the universe is not perfect. It is a place of constant change and flux. Suffering and joy, creation and destruction, are all part of that flux. It is not the work of a single living being but the result of countless interactions and natural forces."

Sam felt a sense of clarity wash over him. The ghost's words resonated with him, providing a new perspective on the universe and his place in it. He thanked the ghost, who smiled and faded away, leaving Sam alone in the quiet London street.

III
As Sam walked the rest of the way home, he felt a sense of peace. The ghost's words had given him a new understanding of the universe,

one that did not require an almighty god but acknowledged the complexity and interconnectedness of all things.

When he finally reached his house, he felt a profound sense of gratitude for the discussion with his friends and the encounter with the ghost. He knew that his perspective had somewhat changed, and he was eager to share his newfound understanding about the universe with his friends.

As he lay down to sleep, he felt a sense of contentment. The universe was a complex and wondrous place, full of mysteries and possibilities. And he was a part of it, just as the ghosts and the stars and the countless interactions and forces were.

With that thought, Sam drifted off to sleep, his mind at peace and his heart filled with a newfound sense of wonder and awe.

The Happiness

It was tea time, before the lamps were brought in. The villa stood above the sea; the vanished sun had left the sky all rosy with its passing, dusted with a golden powder; and the Mediterranean, without a wave or a ripple, stretching out flat and smooth and shimmering still under the dying day, seemed a vast, polished sheet of metal. To the right, stretching off into the distance, jagged mountains cast their black silhouettes against the fading crimson of the sunset.

They were speaking of love, discussing that old subject, saying again the things that have already been said so many times before. The sweet melancholy of twilight slowed their speech, caused a tender emotion to well up in their souls; and this word "love," which was heard again and again—now spoken by a strong, manly voice, now by a soft woman's voice—seemed to fill the little salon, fluttering through it like a bird, hovering in it like a spirit.

Can one love continuously for many years? "Yes," said some; "no," claimed others. They distinguished cases, established distinctions, cited examples; and everyone, men and women, full of powerful and stirring memories that rose to their lips as examples, seemed touched; and spoke of this banal and sovereign thing, the tender and mysterious accord of two beings, with a profound emotion and ardent interest.

Then all of a sudden someone, staring off into the distance, cried, "Oh! Look, there! What is that?"

Above the sea, at the edge of the horizon, an enormous, indistinct gray mass was emerging. The women had gotten up and were staring uncomprehendingly at this shocking thing they had never seen before.

Someone said, "It's Corsica! You can see it two or three times a year like this, under certain unusual atmospheric conditions, when the air becomes perfectly clear and no longer hides it behind the haze that always obscures things in the distance."

They could vaguely make out the crests of the peaks; some thought they could see snow on the summits. And everyone was surprised, troubled, almost frightened by this sudden appearance of a world, this phantom risen from the sea. Perhaps those who set out, like Columbus, across unexplored oceans, had these strange visions.

Then an elderly gentleman, who had not yet spoken, said, "Listen, I

met on this island—which has appeared before us as if in answer to what we have been saying, and which has reminded me of a singular memory—I met with an admirable example of a constant love, an incredibly happy love. Here it is:

II

Five years ago, I took a trip to Corsica. This wild island is more unknown and more distant to us than America, even though you can see it sometimes from the coasts of France, like today.

Picture a world still in chaos, a tempest of mountains separating narrow ravines with rushing torrents. Not a plain anywhere, but immense crags of granite and giant undulations of earth covered with scrub or high forests of chestnut and pine. It's virgin soil, uncultivated, deserted, even though sometimes you see a village, looking like a pile of rocks at the summit of a mountain. No culture, no industry, no art. You never encounter a piece of worked wood, a bit of sculpted stone, never encounter evidence of an ancestral taste for graceful and beautiful things, however simple. It is precisely this that strikes one the most about this superb and hard land: the hereditary indifference to that search after seductive forms called art.

Italy—where each palace, full of masterpieces, is itself a masterpiece; where marble, wood, bronze, iron, all metals and stones attest to the genius of man; where the smallest old objects laying around in the old houses reveal this divine care for gracefulness—is for us all the sacred patrimony that we love because it shows us, demonstrates to us, the effort, the grandeur, the power and the triumph of creative intelligence.

And, just across from Italy, wild Corsica has remained as it was in its first days. Humanity lives there in its crudest house, indifferent to everything that is not immediately relevant to its immediate existence or its family quarrels. And it has retained the faults and qualities of the uncultivated races: violent, hateful, bloody without conscience; but also hospitable, generous, devoted, naïve, opening its door to the passer-by and giving its faithful friendship after the slightest sign of sympathy.

And so for a month, I had wandered through this magnificent island, with the feeling that I was at the end of the world. No inns, no bars, no roads. By mule paths you reach these tiny villages clinging to the sides of the mountains, and which stand over tortuous abysses from which you hear rising, at night, a continuous noise, the heavy and profound voice of the torrent. You knock on the doors of the houses, you ask for shelter for the night and something to eat to last you till the next day.

And you sit at the humble table, and sleep under the humble roof; and in the morning you shake the hand of your host, who has led you to the edge of the village.

So, one night, after ten hours' walk, I reached a small dwelling all alone at the bottom of a narrow valley that opened onto the sea a little farther on. The two steep slopes of the mountain, covered with brush, broken rock, and giant trees, closed in on this dismally sad ravine like two dark walls. Around the cottage a few vines, a small garden, and farther on, a few large chestnut trees; enough to live by at least, a fortune for this impoverished land.

The woman who received me was old, severe, and proper without exception. The man, sitting in a cane chair, got up to greet me, then sat down again without saying a word. His companion said to me, "Excuse him; he's deaf now. He's 82 years old."

She spoke the French of France. I was surprised. I asked her, "You're not from Corsica?"

She answered, "No, we're from the continent. But we have lived here for fifty years now."

A feeling of anguish and fear seized me at the thought of those fifty years passed in this dark hole, so far from towns where people live. An old sheepdog wandered in, and we sat down to eat the only dinner dish, a thick soup of potatoes, lard, and cabbage.

When the short meal was finished I went to sit before the door, my heart engulfed by the melancholy of the mournful country, wrapped in that distress which sometimes grips travelers on certain sad evenings, in certain desolate places. It seemed that everything was about to end, existence and the universe. I suddenly saw the terrible misery of life, the isolation of everyone, the nothingness of everything, and the black solitude of the heart, deluding itself with dreams until death.

The old woman joined me and, tortured by that curiosity that always lives at the bottom of the most resigned souls, asked, "So, you come from France?"

"Yes, I'm on a pleasure trip."

"You're from Paris, perhaps?"

"No, I'm from Nancy."

It seemed to me that an extraordinary emotion was agitating her. How I saw, or rather sensed this, I don't know.

She repeated in a slow voice, "You're from Nancy?"

The man appeared in the doorway, impassive, as deaf people are.

She said, "Don't pay any attention to him. He can't hear anything." Then, after a few seconds, "So, you know everyone in Nancy?"

"Of course, almost everyone."

"The Sainte-Allaize family?"

"Yes, very well. They were friends of my father's."

"What's your name?"

I told her my name. She stared at me fixedly, then said, in that low voice of awakening memories, "Yes, yes, I remember well. And the Brisemaes, what has become of them?"

"They are all dead."

"Ah! And the Sirmonts, you know them?"

"Yes, the last one is a general."

Then she said, trembling with emotion, with anguish, with I don't know what confused, powerful, and holy sentiments, with I don't know what need to avow, to tell everything, to speak of those things that she had held until then enclosed at the bottom of her heart, to speak of those people whose name shook her soul: "Yes, Henri de Sirmont. I know him well. He is my brother."

I raised my eyes toward her, bewildered with surprise. And all of a sudden it came back to me.

A long time ago, it had caused a terrible scandal in noble Lorraine. A young girl, beautiful and rich, Suzanne de Sirmont, had been carried off by a sergeant in the regiment that her father commanded. He was a handsome boy, the son of peasants, but looking good in his dress

uniform, this soldier who had seduced the daughter of his colonel. No doubt she had seen him, noticed him, fell in love with him while watching the troops march by. But how had he spoken to her, how had they been able to see each other, to talk? How had she dared to make him understand that she loved him? No one ever knew.

No one suspected anything. One night, as the soldier had just finished his enlistment, he disappeared with her. They sought for them, but never found them. They never heard from her again, and they considered her dead.

And I had found her in that sinister valley.

Then I said, in my turn, "Yes, I remember well. You are Suzanne."

She shook her head yes. Tears fell from her eyes. Then, with a glance at the old man sitting immobile on the doorstep of the shack, she told me, "It's him."

And I understood that she still loved him, that she still saw him with seduced eyes.

I asked, "Have you been happy, at least?"

She answered, with a voice that came from the heart, "Oh! Yes, very happy. He has made me very happy. I have never regretted anything."

I contemplated her, sad, surprised, amazed by the power of love! This rich girl had followed this man, this peasant. She had herself become a peasant. She had lived her life without charms, without luxuries, without delicacies of any sort, she had bent herself to his simple habits. And she loved him still. She had become a rustic, in a bonnet and canvas skirt. She ate on an earthenware plate on a crude wooden table, sitting on a cane seat, a gruel of cabbage and potatoes with lard. She lay on a straw mattress by his side.

She had never thought of anything, but him! She had missed neither necklaces, nor fineries, nor elegances, nor soft seats, nor the perfumed warmth of rooms enveloped in curtains, nor the sweetness of downy cushions on which to rest one's body. She had never needed anything but him; as long as he was there, she desired nothing.

She had abandoned life while young, both the world and those who had raised her and loved her. She had come, alone with him, to this wild ravine. And he had been everything for her, everything one

desires, everything one dreams of, everything one constantly waits for, everything one endlessly hopes. He had filled her existence with happiness, from one end to the other. She couldn't have been happier.

And all night, listening to the rough breathing of the old soldier stretched out on his pallet, beside her who had followed him so far, I thought of that strange and simple adventure, of this happiness so complete, made of so little.

And I left with the rising sun, after having shaken hands with the two old people, man and wife."

III

The old man fell silent.

A woman said, "All the same, she had an ideal that was too easy, needs that were too primitive, and requirements that were too simple. She was just a fool."

Someone else said in a slow voice, "What does that matter! She was happy."

And there, at the farthest edge of the horizon, Corsica disappeared into the night, sank back slowly into the sea, its great shadow fading away, which had appeared as if itself to tell the story of the two humble lovers sheltered on its shores.

The Cremona Violin

By E.T.A. Hoffmann. (1776-1822)

Translated by J.T. Beally.

Councillor Krespel was one of the strangest, oddest men I ever met with in my life. When I went to live in H—for a time the whole town was full of talk about him, as he happened to be just then in the midst of one of the very craziest of his schemes. Krespel had the reputation of being both a clever, learned lawyer and a skilful diplomatist. One of the reigning princes of Germany—not, however, one of the most powerful—had appealed to him for assistance in drawing up a memorial, which he was desirous of presenting at the Imperial Court with the view of furthering his legitimate claims upon a certain strip of territory. The project was crowned with the happiest success; and as

Krespel had once complained that he could never find a dwelling sufficiently comfortable to suit him, the prince, to reward him for the memorial, undertook to defray the cost of building a house which Krespel might erect just as he pleased. Moreover, the prince was willing to purchase any site that he should fancy. This offer, however, the Councillor would not accept; he insisted that the house should be built in his garden, situated in a very beautiful neighborhood outside the town-walls. So he bought all kinds of materials and had them carted out. Then he might have been seen day after day, attired in his curious garments (which he had made himself according to certain fixed rules of his own), slacking the lime, riddling the sand, packing up the bricks and stones in regular heaps, and so on. All this he did without once consulting an architect or thinking about a plan. One fine day, however, he went to an experienced builder of the town and requested him to be in his garden at daybreak the next morning, with all his journeymen and apprentices, and a large body of laborers, etc., to build him his house. Naturally the builder asked for the architect's plan, and was not a little astonished when Krespel replied that none was needed, and that things would turn out all right in the end, just as he wanted them. Next morning, when the builder and his men came to the place, they found a trench drawn out in the shape of an exact square; and Krespel said, "Here's where you must lay the foundations; then carry up the walls until I say they are high enough." "Without windows and doors, and without partition walls?" broke in the builder, as if alarmed at Krespel's mad folly. "Do what I tell you, my dear sir," replied the Councillor quite calmly; "leave the rest to me; it will be all right." It was only the promise of high pay that could induce the builder to proceed with the ridiculous building; but none has ever been erected under merrier circumstances. As there was an abundant supply of food and drink, the workmen never left their work; and amidst their continuous laughter the four walls were run up with incredible quickness, until one day Krespel cried, "Stop!" Then the workmen, laying down trowel and hammer, came down from the scaffoldings and gathered round Krespel in a circle, whilst every laughing face was asking, "Well, and what now?" "Make way!" cried Krespel; and then running to one end of the garden, he strode slowly towards the square of brickwork. When he came close to the wall he shook his head in a dissatisfied manner, ran to the other end of the garden, again strode slowly towards the brickwork square, and proceeded to act as before. These tactics he pursued several times, until at length, running his sharp nose hard against the wall, he cried, "Come here, come here, men! break me a door in here! Here's where I want a door made!" He gave the exact dimensions in feet and inches, and they did as he bid them. Then he stepped inside the structure, and smiled with

satisfaction as the builder remarked that the walls were just the height of a good two-storeyed house. Krespel walked thoughtfully backwards and forwards across the space within, the bricklayers behind him with hammers and picks, and wherever he cried, "Make a window here, six feet high by four feet broad!" "There a little window, three feet by two!" a hole was made in a trice.

It was at this stage of the proceedings that I came to H—; and it was highly amusing to see how hundreds of people stood round about the garden and raised a loud shout whenever the stones flew out and a new window appeared where nobody had for a moment expected it. And in the same manner Krespel proceeded with the buildings and fittings of the rest of the house, and with all the work necessary to that end; everything had to be done on the spot in accordance with the instructions which the Councillor gave from time to time. However, the absurdity of the whole business, the growing conviction that things would in the end turn out better than might have been expected, but above all, Krespel's generosity—which indeed cost him nothing—kept them all in good-humor. Thus were the difficulties overcome which necessarily arose out of this eccentric way of building, and in a short time there was a completely finished house, its outside, indeed, presenting a most extraordinary appearance, no two windows, etc., being alike, but on the other hand the interior arrangements suggested a peculiar feeling of comfort. All who entered the house bore witness to the truth of this; and I too experienced it myself when I was taken in by Krespel after I had become more intimate with him. For hitherto I had not exchanged a word with this eccentric man; his building had occupied him so much that he had not even once been to Professor M——'s to dinner, as he was in the habit of doing on Tuesdays. Indeed, in reply to a special invitation, he sent word that he should not set foot over the threshold before the house-warming of his new building took place. All his friends and acquaintances, therefore, confidently looked forward to a great banquet; but Krespel invited nobody except the masters, journeymen, apprentices, and laborers who had built the house. He entertained them with the choicest viands; bricklayers' apprentices devoured partridge pies regardless of consequences; young joiners polished off roast pheasants with the greatest success; whilst hungry laborers helped themselves for once to the choicest morsels of truffles fricassees. In the evening their wives and daughters came, and there was a great ball. After waltzing a short while with the wives of the masters, Krespel sat down amongst the town musicians, took a violin in his hand, and directed the orchestra until daylight.

On the Tuesday after this festival, which exhibited Councillor Krespel

in the character of a friend of the people, I at length saw him appear, to my no little joy, at Professor M——'s. Anything more strange and fantastic than Krespel's behavior it would be impossible to find. He was so stiff and awkward in his movements, that he looked every moment as if he would run up against something or do some damage. But he did not; and the lady of the house seemed to be well aware that he would not, for she did not grow a shade paler when he rushed with heavy steps round a table crowded with beautiful cups, or when he manoeuvred near a large mirror that reached down to the floor, or even when he seized a flower-pot of beautifully painted porcelain and swung it round in the air as if desirous of making its colors play. Moreover, before dinner he subjected everything in the Professor's room to a most minute examination; he also took down a picture from the wall and hung it up again, standing on one of the cushioned chairs to do so. At the same time he talked a good deal and vehemently; at one time his thoughts kept leaping, as it were, from one subject to another (this was most conspicuous during dinner); at another, he was unable to have done with an idea; seizing upon it again and again, he gave it all sorts of wonderful twists and turns, and couldn't get back into the ordinary track until something else took hold of his fancy. Sometimes his voice was rough and harsh and screeching, and sometimes it was low and drawling and singing; but at no time did it harmonize with what he was about. Music was the subject of conversation; the praises of a new composer were being sung, when Krespel, smiling, said in his low, singing tones, "I wish the devil with his pitchfork would hurl that atrocious garbler of music millions of fathoms down to the bottomless pit of hell!" Then he burst out passionately and wildly, "She is an angel of heaven, nothing but pure God-given music!—the paragon and queen of song!"—and tears stood in his eyes. To understand this, we had to go back to a celebrated artiste, who had been the subject of conversation an hour before.

Just at this time a roast hare was on the table; I noticed that Krespel carefully removed every particle of meat from the bones on his plate, and was most particular in his inquiries after the hare's feet; these the Professor's little five-year-old daughter now brought to him with a very pretty smile. Besides, the children had cast many friendly glances towards Krespel during dinner; now they rose and drew nearer to him, but not without signs of timorous awe. What's the meaning of that? thought I to myself. Dessert was brought in; then the Councillor took a little box from his pocket, in which he had a miniature lathe of steel. This he immediately screwed fast to the table, and turning the bones with incredible skill and rapidity, he made all sorts of little fancy boxes and balls, which the children received with cries of delight. Just as we

were rising from table, the Professor's niece asked, "And what is our Antonia doing?" Krespel's face was like that of one who has bitten of a sour orange and wants to look as if it were a sweet one; but this expression soon changed into the likeness of a hideous mask, whilst he laughed behind it with downright, bitter, fierce, and, as it seemed to me, satanic scorn. "Our Antonia? our dear Antonia?" he asked in his drawling, disagreeable singing way. The Professor hastened to intervene; in the reproving glance which he gave his niece I read that she had touched a point likely to stir up unpleasant memories in Krespel's heart. "How are you getting on with your violins?" interposed the Professor in a jovial manner, taking the Councillor by both hands. Then Krespel's countenance cleared up, and with a firm voice he replied, "Capitally, Professor; you recollect my telling you of the lucky chance which threw that splendid Amati [Footnote: The Amati were a celebrated family of violin-makers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, belonging to Cremona in Italy. They form the connecting-link between the Brescian school of makers and the greatest of all makers, Straduaris and Guarnerius.] into my hands. Well, I've only cut it open to-day—not before to-day. I hope Antonia has carefully taken the rest of it to pieces." "Antonia is a good child," remarked the Professor. "Yes, indeed, that she is," cried the Councillor, whisking himself round; then, seizing his hat and stick, he hastily rushed out of the room. I saw in the mirror how that tears were standing in his eyes.

As soon as the Councillor was gone, I at once urged the Professor to explain to me what Krespel had to do with violins, and particularly with Antonia. "Well," replied the Professor, "not only is the Councillor a remarkably eccentric fellow altogether, but he practises violin-making in his own crack-brained way." "Violin-making!" I exclaimed, perfectly astonished. "Yes," continued the Professor, "according to the judgment of men who understand the thing, Krespel makes the very best violins that can be found nowadays; formerly he would frequently let other people play on those in which he had been especially successful, but that's been all over and done with now for a long time. As soon as he has finished a violin he plays on it himself for one or two hours, with very remarkable power and with the most exquisite expression, then he hangs it up beside the rest, and never touches it again or suffers anybody else to touch it. If a violin by any of the eminent old masters is hunted up anywhere, the Councillor buys it immediately, no matter what the price put upon it. But he plays it as he does his own violins, only once; then he takes it to pieces in order to examine closely its inner structure, and should he fancy he hasn't found exactly what he sought for, he in a pet throws the pieces into a big chest, which is already full of the remains of broken violins." "But who and what is

Antonia?" I inquired, hastily and impetuously. "Well, now, that," continued the Professor,— "that is a thing which might very well make me conceive an unconquerable aversion to the Councillor, were I not convinced that there is some peculiar secret behind it, for he is such a good-natured fellow at bottom as to be sometimes guilty of weakness. When we came to H—, several years ago, he led the life of an anchorite, along with an old housekeeper, in ——— Street. Soon, by his oddities, he excited the curiosity of his neighbors; and immediately he became aware of this, he sought and made acquaintances. Not only in my house but everywhere we became so accustomed to him that he grew to be indispensable. In spite of his rude exterior, even the children liked him, without ever proving a nuisance to him; for, notwithstanding all their friendly passages together, they always retained a certain timorous awe of him, which secured him against all over-familiarity. You have to-day had an example of the way in which he wins their hearts by his ready skill in various things. We all took him at first for a crusty old bachelor, and he never contradicted us. After he had been living here some time, he went away, nobody knew where, and returned at the end of some months. The evening following his return his windows were lit up to an unusual extent! This alone was sufficient to arouse his neighbors' attention, and they soon heard the surpassingly beautiful voice of a female singing to the accompaniment of a piano. Then the music of a violin was heard chiming in and entering upon a keen ardent contest with the voice. They knew at once that the player was the Councillor. I myself mixed in the large crowd which had gathered in front of his house to listen to this extraordinary concert; and I must confess that, besides this voice and the peculiar, deep, soul-stirring impression which the execution made upon me, the singing of the most celebrated artistes whom I had ever heard seemed to me feeble and void of expression. Until then I had had no conception of such long-sustained notes, of such nightingale trills, of such undulations of musical sound, of such swelling up to the strength of organ-notes, of such dying away to the faintest whisper. There was not one whom the sweet witchery did not enthrall; and when the singer ceased, nothing but soft sighs broke the impressive silence. Somewhere about midnight the Councillor was heard talking violently, and another male voice seemed, to judge from the tones, to be reproaching him, whilst at intervals the broken words of a sobbing girl could be detected. The Councillor continued to shout with increasing violence, until he fell into that drawling, singing way that you know. He was interrupted by a loud scream from the girl, and then all was as still as death. Suddenly a loud racket was heard on the stairs; a young man rushed out sobbing, threw himself into a post-chaise which stood below, and drove rapidly away. The next day the Councillor was very

cheerful, and nobody had the courage to question him about the events of the previous night. But on inquiring of the housekeeper, we gathered that the Councillor had brought home with him an extraordinarily pretty young lady whom he called Antonia, and she it was who had sung so beautifully. A young man also had come along with them; he had treated Antonia very tenderly, and must evidently have been her betrothed. But he, since the Councillor peremptorily insisted on it, had had to go away again in a hurry. What the relations between Antonia and the Councillor are has remained until now a secret, but this much is certain, that he tyrannizes over the poor girl in the most hateful fashion. He watches her as Doctor Bartholo watches his ward in the Barber of Seville; she hardly dare show herself at the window; and if, yielding now and again to her earnest entreaties, he takes her into society, he follows her with Argus' eyes, and will on no account suffer a musical note to be sounded, far less let Antonia sing—indeed, she is not permitted to sing in his own house. Antonia's singing on that memorable night has, therefore, come to be regarded by the townspeople in the light of a tradition of some marvellous wonder that suffices to stir the heart and the fancy; and even those who did not hear it often exclaim, ever any other singer attempts to display her powers in the place, 'What sort of a wretched squeaking do you call that? Nobody but Antonia knows how to sing.'"

Having a singular weakness for such like fantastic histories, I found it necessary, as may easily be imagined, to make Antonia's acquaintance. I had myself often enough heard the popular sayings about her singing, but had never imagined that that exquisite artiste was living in the place, held a captive in the bonds of this eccentric Krespel like the victim of a tyrannous sorcerer. Naturally enough I heard in my dreams on the following night Antonia's marvellous voice, and as she besought me in the most touching manner in a glorious adagio movement (very ridiculously it seemed to me, as if I had composed it myself) to save her—I soon resolved, like a second Astolpho,[Footnote: A reference to Ariosto's Orlando Furioso. Astolpho, an English cousin of Orlando, was a great boaster, but generous, courteous, gay, and remarkably handsome; he was carried to Alcina's island on the back of a whale.] to penetrate into Krespel's house, as if into another Alcina's magic castle, and deliver the queen of song from her ignominious fetters.

It all came about in a different way from what I had expected; I had seen the Councillor scarcely more than two or three times, and eagerly discussed with him the best method of constructing violins, when he invited me to call and see him. I did so; and he showed me his

treasures of violins. There were fully thirty of them hanging up in a closet; one amongst them bore conspicuously all the marks of great antiquity (a carved lion's head, etc.), and, hung up higher than the rest, and surmounted by a crown of flowers, it seemed to exercise a queenly supremacy over them. "This violin," said Krespel, on my making some inquiry relative to it, "this violin is a very remarkable and curious specimen of the work of some unknown master, probably of Tartini's [Footnote: Giuseppe Tartini, born in 1692, died in 1770, was one of the most celebrated violinists of the eighteenth century, and the discoverer (in 1714) of "resultant tones," or "Tartini's tones," as they are frequently called. Most of his life was spent at Padua. He did much to advance the art of the violinist, both by his compositions for that instrument, as well as by his treatise on its capabilities.] age. I am perfectly convinced that there is something especially exceptional in its inner construction, and that, if I took it to pieces, a secret would be revealed to me which I have long been seeking to discover, but—laugh at me if you like—this senseless thing which only gives signs of life and sound as I make it, often speaks to me in a strange way of itself. The first time I played upon it I somehow fancied that I was only the magnetizer who has the power of moving his subject to reveal of his own accord in words the visions of his inner nature. Don't go away with the belief that I am such a fool as to attach even the slightest importance to such fantastic notions, and yet it's certainly strange that I could never prevail upon myself to cut open that dumb lifeless thing there. I am very pleased now that I have not cut it open, for since Antonia has been with me I sometimes play to her upon this violin. For Antonia is fond of it—very fond of it." As the Councillor uttered these words with visible signs of emotion, I felt encouraged to hazard the question, "Will you not play it to me, Councillor?" Krespel made a wry face, and falling into his drawling, singing way, said, "No, my good sir!" and that was an end of the matter. Then I had to look at all sorts of rare curiosities, the greater part of them childish trifles; at last thrusting his arm into a chest, he brought out a folded piece of paper, which he pressed into my hand, adding solemnly, "You are a lover of art; take this present as a priceless memento, which you must value at all times above everything else." Therewith he took me by the shoulders and gently pushed me towards the door, embracing me on the threshold. That is to say, I was in a symbolical manner virtually kicked out of doors. Unfolding the paper, I found a piece of a first string of a violin about an eighth of an inch in length, with the words, "A piece of the treble string with which the deceased Stamitz [Footnote: This was the name of a well-known musical family from Bohemia. Karl Stamitz is the one here possibly meant, since he died about eighteen or twenty years previous to the publication of this tale.] strung his violin for the last

concert at which he ever played."

This summary dismissal at mention of Antonia's name led me to infer that I should never see her; but I was mistaken, for on my second visit to the Councillor's I found her in his room, assisting him to put a violin together. At first sight Antonia did not make a strong impression; but soon I found it impossible to tear myself away from her blue eyes, her sweet rosy lips, her uncommonly graceful, lovely form. She was very pale; but a shrewd remark or a merry sally would call up a winning smile on her face and suffuse her cheeks with a deep burning flush, which, however, soon faded away to a faint rosy glow. My conversation with her was quite unconstrained, and yet I saw nothing whatever of the Argus-like watchings on Krespel's part which the Professor had imputed to him; on the contrary, his behavior moved along the customary lines, nay, he even seemed to approve of my conversation with Antonia. So I often stepped in to see the Councillor; and as we became accustomed to each other's society, a singular feeling of homeliness, taking possession of our little circle of three, filled our hearts with inward happiness. I still continued to derive exquisite enjoyment from the Councillor's strange crotchets and oddities; but it was of course Antonia's irresistible charms alone which attracted me, and led me to put up with a good deal which I should otherwise, in the frame of mind in which I then was, have impatiently shunned. For it only too often happened that in the Councillor's characteristic extravagance there was mingled much that was dull and tiresome; and it was in a special degree irritating to me that, as often as I turned the conversation upon music, and particularly upon singing, he was sure to interrupt me, with that sardonic smile upon his face and those repulsive singing tones of his, by some remark of a quite opposite tendency, very often of a commonplace character. From the great distress which at such times Antonia's glances betrayed, I perceived that he only did it to deprive me of a pretext for calling upon her for a song. But I didn't relinquish my design. The hindrances which the Councillor threw in my way only strengthened my resolution to overcome them; I MUST hear Antonia sing if I was not to pine away in reveries and dim aspirations for want of hearing her.

One evening Krespel was in an uncommonly good humor; he had been taking an old Cremona violin to pieces, and had discovered that the sound-post was fixed half a line more obliquely than usual—an important discovery!—one of incalculable advantage in the practical work of making violins! I succeeded in setting him off at full speed on his hobby of the true art of violin-playing. Mention of the way in which the old masters picked up their dexterity in execution from really great

singers (which was what Krespel happened just then to be expatiating upon) naturally paved the way for the remark that now the practice was the exact opposite of this, the vocal score erroneously following the affected and abrupt transitions and rapid scaling of the instrumentalists. "What is more nonsensical," I cried, leaping from my chair, running to the piano, and opening it quickly—"what is more nonsensical than such an execrable style as this, which, far from being music, is much more like the noise of peas rolling across the floor?" At the same time I sang several of the modern fermatas, which rush up and down and hum like a well-spun peg-top, striking a few villainous chords by way of accompaniment.

Krespel laughed outrageously and screamed: "Ha! ha! methinks I hear our German-Italians or our Italian-Germans struggling with an aria from Pucitta, [Footnote: Vincenzo Pucitta (1778-1861) was an Italian opera composer, whose music "shows great facility, but no invention." He also wrote several songs.] or Portogallo, [Footnote: Il Portogallo was the Italian sobriquet of a Portuguese musician named Mark Anthony Simao (1763-1829). He lived alternately in Italy and Portugal, and wrote several operas.] or some other Maestro di capella, or rather schiavo d'un primo uomo." [Footnote: Literally, "The slave of a primo uomo," primo uomo being the masculine form corresponding to prima donna, that is, a singer of hero's parts in operatic music. At one time also female parts were sung and acted by men or boys.] Now, thought I, now's the time; so turning to Antonia, I remarked, "Antonia knows nothing of such singing as that, I believe?" At the same time I struck up one of old Leonardo Leo's [Footnote: Leonardo Leo, the chief Neapolitan representative of Italian music in the first part of the eighteenth century, and author of more than forty operas and nearly one hundred compositions for the Church.] beautiful soul-stirring songs. Then Antonia's cheeks glowed; heavenly radiance sparkled in her eyes, which grew full of reawakened inspiration; she hastened to the piano; she opened her lips; but at that very moment Krespel pushed her away, grasped me by the shoulders, and with a shriek that rose up to a tenor pitch, cried, "My son—my son—my son!" And then he immediately went on, singing very softly, and grasping my hand with a bow that was the pink of politeness, "In very truth, my esteemed and honorable student-friend, in very truth, it would be a violation of the codes of social intercourse, as well as of all good manners, were I to express aloud and in a stirring way my wish that here, on this very spot, the devil from hell would softly break your neck with his burning claws, and so in a sense make short work of you; but, setting that aside, you must acknowledge, my dearest friend, that it is rapidly growing dark, and there are no lamps burning to-night, so that, even

though I did not kick you downstairs at once, your darling limbs might still run a risk of suffering damage. Go home by all means; and cherish a kind remembrance of your faithful friend, if it should happen that you never,—pray, understand me,—If you should never see him in his own house again." Therewith he embraced me, and, still keeping fast hold of me, turned with me slowly towards the door, so that I could not get another single look at Antonia. Of course it is plain enough that in my position I couldn't thrash the Councillor, though that is what he really deserved. The Professor enjoyed a good laugh at my expense, and assured me that I had ruined for ever all hopes of retaining the Councillor's friendship. Antonia was too dear to me, I might say too holy, for me to go and play the part of the languishing lover and stand gazing up at her window, or to fill the role of the lovesick adventurer. Completely upset, I went away from H—; but, as is usual in such cases, the brilliant colors of the picture of my fancy faded, and the recollection of Antonia, as well as of Antonia's singing (which I had never heard), often fell upon my heart like a soft faint trembling light, comforting me.

Two years afterwards I received an appointment in B—, and set out on a journey to the south of Germany. The towers of H— rose before me in the red vaporous glow of the evening; the nearer I came the more was I oppressed by an indescribable feeling of the most agonizing distress; it lay upon me like a heavy burden; I could not breathe; I was obliged to get out of my carriage into the open air. But my anguish continued to increase until it became actual physical pain. Soon I seemed to hear the strains of a solemn chorale floating in the air; the sounds continued to grow more distinct; I realized the fact that they were men's voices chanting a church chorale. "What's that? what's that?" I cried, a burning stab darting as it were through my breast. "Don't you see?" replied the coachman, who was driving along beside me, "why don't you see? they're burying somebody up yonder in yon churchyard." And indeed we were near the churchyard; I saw a circle of men clothed in black standing round a grave, which was on the point of being closed. Tears started to my eyes; I somehow fancied they were burying there all the joy and all the happiness of life. Moving on rapidly down the hill, I was no longer able to see into the churchyard; the chorale came to an end, and I perceived not far distant from the gate some of the mourners returning from the funeral. The Professor, with his niece on his arm, both in deep mourning, went close past me without noticing me. The young lady had her handkerchief pressed close to her eyes, and was weeping bitterly. In the frame of mind in which I then was I could not possibly go into the town, so I sent on my servant with the carriage to the hotel where I

usually put up, whilst I took a turn in the familiar neighborhood to get rid of a mood that was possibly only due to physical causes, such as heating on the journey, etc. On arriving at a well-known avenue, which leads to a pleasure resort, I came upon a most extraordinary spectacle. Councillor Krespel was being conducted by two mourners, from whom he appeared to be endeavoring to make his escape by all sorts of strange twists and turns. As usual, he was dressed in his own curious home-made gray coat; but from his little cocked-hat, which he wore perched over one ear in military fashion, a long narrow ribbon of black crape fluttered backwards and forwards in the wind. Around his waist he had buckled a black sword-belt; but instead of a sword he had stuck a long fiddle-bow into it. A creepy shudder ran through my limbs: "He's insane," thought I, as I slowly followed them. The Councillor's companions led him as far as his house, where he embraced them, laughing loudly. They left him; and then his glance fell upon me, for I now stood near him. He stared at me fixedly for some time; then he cried in a hollow voice, "Welcome, my student friend! you also understand it!" Therewith he took me by the arm and pulled me into the house, up the steps, into the room where the violins hung. They were all draped in black crape; the violin of the old master was missing; in its place was a cypress wreath. I knew what had happened. "Antonia! Antonia!" I cried, in inconsolable grief. The Councillor, with his arms crossed on his breast, stood beside me, as if turned into stone. I pointed to the cypress wreath. "When she died," said he, in a very hoarse solemn voice, "when she died, the sound-post of that violin broke into pieces with a ringing crack, and the sound-board was split from end to end. The faithful instrument could only live with her and in her; it lies beside her in the coffin, it has been buried with her." Deeply agitated, I sank down upon a chair, whilst the Councillor began to sing a gay song in a husky voice; it was truly horrible to see him hopping about on one foot, and the crape strings (he still had his hat on) flying about the room and up to the violins hanging on the walls. Indeed, I could not repress a loud cry that rose to my lips when, on the Councillor making an abrupt turn, the crape came all over me; I fancied he wanted to envelop me in it and drag me down into the horrible dark depths of insanity. Suddenly he stood still and addressed me in his singing way, "My son! my son! why do you call out? Have you espied the angel of death? That always precedes the ceremony." Stepping into the middle of the room, he took the violin-bow out of his sword-belt, and, holding it over his head with both hands, broke it into a thousand pieces. Then, with a loud laugh, he cried, "Now you imagine my sentence is pronounced, don't you, my son? but it's nothing of the kind—not at all! not at all! Now I'm free—free—free—hurrah! I'm free! Now I shall make no more violins—no more violins—hurrah! no more

violins!" This he sang to a horrible mirthful tune, again spinning round on one foot. Perfectly aghast, I was making the best of my way to the door, when he held me fast, saying quite calmly, "Stay, my student friend, pray don't think from this outbreak of grief, which is torturing me as if with the agonies of death, that I am insane; I only do it because a short time ago I made myself a dressing-gown in which I wanted to look like Fate or like God!" The Councillor then went on with a medley of silly and awful rubbish, until he fell down utterly exhausted; I called up the old housekeeper, and was very pleased to find myself in the open air again.

I never doubted for a moment that Krespel had become insane; the Professor, however, asserted the contrary. "There are men," he remarked, "from whom nature or a special destiny has taken away the cover behind which the mad folly of the rest of us runs its course unobserved. They are like thin-skinned insects, which, as we watch the restless play of their muscles, seem to be misshapen, while nevertheless everything soon comes back into its proper form again. All that with us remains thought passes over with Krespel into action. That bitter scorn which the spirit that is wrapped up in the doings and dealings of the earth often has at hand, Krespel gives vent to in outrageous gestures and agile caprioles. But these are his lightning conductor. What comes up out of the earth he gives again to the earth, but what is divine, that he keeps; and so I believe that his inner consciousness, in spite of the apparent madness which springs from it to the surface, is as right as a trivet. To be sure, Antonia's sudden death grieves him sore, but I warrant that to-morrow will see him going along in his old jog-trot way as usual." And the Professor's prediction was almost literally filled. Next day the Councillor appeared to be just as he formerly was, only he averred that he would never make another violin, nor yet ever play on another. And, as I learned later, he kept his word.

Hints which the Professor let fall confirmed my own private conviction that the so carefully guarded secret of the Councillor's relations to Antonia, nay, that even her death, was a crime which must weigh heavily upon him, a crime that could not be atoned for. I determined that I would not leave H—— without taxing him with the offence which I conceived him to be guilty of; I determined to shake his heart down to its very roots, and so compel him to make open confession of the terrible deed. The more I reflected upon the matter, the clearer it grew in my own mind that Krespel must be a villain, and in the same proportion did my intended reproach, which assumed of itself the form of a real rhetorical masterpiece, wax more fiery and more impressive.

Thus equipped and mightily incensed, I hurried to his house. I found him with a calm smiling countenance making playthings. "How can peace," I burst out—"how can peace find lodgment even for a single moment in your breast, so long as the memory of your horrible deed preys like a serpent upon you?" He gazed at me in amazement, and laid his chisel aside. "What do you mean, my dear sir?" he asked; "pray take a seat." But my indignation chafing me more and more, I went on to accuse him directly of having murdered Antonia, and to threaten him with the vengeance of the Eternal.

Further, as a newly full-fledged lawyer, full of my profession, I went so far as to give him to understand that I would leave no stone unturned to get a clue to the business, and so deliver him here in this world into the hands of an earthly judge. I must confess that I was considerably disconcerted when, at the conclusion of my violent and pompous harangue, the Councillor, without answering so much as a single word, calmly fixed his eyes upon me as though expecting me to go on again. And this I did indeed attempt to do, but it sounded so ill-founded and so stupid as well that I soon grew silent again. Krespel gloated over my embarrassment, whilst a malicious ironical smile flitted across his face. Then he grew very grave, and addressed me in solemn tones. "Young man, no doubt you think I am foolish, insane; that I can pardon you, since we are both confined in the same mad-house; and you only blame me for deluding myself with the idea that I am God the Father because you imagine yourself to be God the Son. But how do you dare desire to insinuate yourself into the secrets and lay bare the hidden motives of a life that is strange to you and that must continue so? She has gone and the mystery is solved." He ceased speaking, rose, and traversed the room backwards and forwards several times. I ventured to ask for an explanation; he fixed his eyes upon me, grasped me by the hand, and led me to the window, which he threw wide open. Propping himself upon his arms, he leaned out, and, looking down into the garden, told me the history of his life. When he finished I left him, touched and ashamed.

In a few words, his relations with Antonia rose in the following way. Twenty years before, the Councillor had been led into Italy by his favorite engrossing passion of hunting up and buying the best violins of the old masters. At that time he had not yet begun to make them himself, and so of course he had not begun to take to pieces those which he bought. In Venice he heard the celebrated singer Angela——i, who at that time was playing with splendid success as prima donna at St. Benedict's Theatre. His enthusiasm was awakened, not only in her art—which Signora Angela had indeed brought to a high pitch of

perfection—but in her angelic beauty as well. He sought her acquaintance; and in spite of all his rugged manners he succeeded in winning her heart, principally through his bold and yet at the same time masterly violin-playing. Close intimacy led in a few weeks to marriage, which, however, was kept a secret, because Angela was unwilling to sever her connection with the theatre, neither did she wish to part with her professional name, that by which she was celebrated, nor to add to it the cacophonous "Krespel." With the most extravagant irony he described to me what a strange life of worry and torture Angela led him as soon as she became his wife. Krespel was of opinion that more capriciousness and waywardness were concentrated in Angela's little person than in all the rest of the prima donnas in the world put together. If he now and again presumed to stand up in his own defence, she let loose a whole army of abbots, musical composers, and students upon him, who, ignorant of his true connection with Angela, soundly rated him as a most intolerable, ungallant lover for not submitting to all the Signora's caprices. It was just after one of these stormy scenes that Krespel fled to Angela's country seat to try and forget in playing fantasias on his Cremona violin the annoyances of the day. But he had not been there long before the Signora, who had followed hard after him, stepped into the room. She was in an affectionate humor; she embraced her husband, overwhelmed him with sweet and languishing glances, and rested her pretty head on his shoulder. But Krespel, carried away into the world of music; continued to play on until the walls echoed again; thus he chanced to touch the Signora somewhat ungently with his arm and the fiddle-bow. She leapt back full of fury, shrieking that he was a "German brute," snatched the violin from his hands, and dashed it on the marble table into a thousand pieces. Krespel stood like a statue of stone before her; but then, as if awakening out of a dream, he seized her with the strength of a giant and threw her out of the window of her own house, and, without troubling himself about anything more, fled back to Venice—to Germany. It was not, however, until some time had elapsed that he had a clear recollection of what he had done; although he knew that the window was scarcely five feet from the ground, and although he was fully cognizant of the necessity, under the above-mentioned circumstances, of throwing the Signora out of the window, he yet felt troubled by a sense of painful uneasiness, and the more so since she had imparted to him in no ambiguous terms an interesting secret as to her condition. He hardly dared to make inquiries; and he was not a little surprised about eight months afterwards at receiving a tender letter from his beloved wife, in which she made not the slightest allusion to what had taken place in her country house, only adding to the intelligence that she had been safely delivered of a sweet little

daughter the heartfelt prayer that her dear husband and now a happy father would come at once to Venice. That, however, Krespel did not do; rather he appealed to a confidential friend for a more circumstantial account of the details, and learned that the Signora had alighted upon the soft grass as lightly as a bird, and that the sole consequences of the fall or shock had been psychic. That is to say, after Krespel's heroic deed she had become completely altered; she never showed a trace of caprice, of her former freaks, or of her teasing habits; and the composer who wrote for the next carnival was the happiest fellow under the sun, since the Signora was willing to sing his music without the scores and hundreds of changes which she at other times had insisted upon. "To be sure," added his friend, "there was every reason for preserving the secret of Angela's cure, else every day would see lady singers flying through windows." The Councillor was not a little excited at this news; he engaged horses; he took his seat in the carriage. "Stop!" he cried suddenly. "Why, there's not a shadow of doubt," he murmured to himself, "that as soon as Angela sets eyes upon me again, the evil spirit will recover his power and once more take possession of her. And since I have already thrown her out of the window, what could I do if a similar case were to occur again? What would there be left for me to do?" He got out of the carriage, and wrote an affectionate letter to his wife, making graceful allusion to her tenderness in especially dwelling upon the fact that his tiny daughter had, like him, a little mole behind the ear, and—remained in Germany. Now ensued an active correspondence between them. Assurances of unchanged affection—invitations—laments over the absence of the beloved one—thwarted wishes—hopes, etc.—flew backwards and forwards from Venice to H——, from H—— to Venice. At length Angela came to Germany, and, as is well known, sang with brilliant success as prima donna at the great theatre in F——. Despite the fact that she was no longer young, she won all hearts by the irresistible charm of her wonderfully splendid singing. At that time she had not lost her voice in the least degree. Meanwhile, Antonia had been growing up; and her mother never tired of writing to tell her father how that a singer of the first rank was developing in her. Krespel's friends in F—— also confirmed this intelligence, and urged him to come for once to F—— to see and admire this uncommon sight of two such glorious singers. They had not the slightest suspicion of the close relations in which Krespel stood to the pair. Willingly would he have seen with his own eyes the daughter who occupied so large a place in his heart, and who moreover often appeared to him in his dreams; but as often as he thought upon his wife he felt very uncomfortable, and so he remained at home amongst his broken violins. There was a certain promising young composer, B—— of F——, who was found to have suddenly

disappeared, nobody knew where. This young man fell so deeply in love with Antonia that, as she returned his love, he earnestly besought her mother to consent to an immediate union, sanctified as it would further be by art. Angela had nothing to urge against his suit; and the Councillor the more readily gave his consent that the young composer's productions had found favor before his rigorous critical judgment. Krespel was expecting to hear of the consummation of the marriage, when he received instead a black-sealed envelope addressed in a strange hand. Doctor R—— conveyed to the Councillor the sad intelligence that Angela had fallen seriously ill in consequence of a cold caught at the theatre, and that during the night immediately preceding what was to have been Antonia's wedding-day, she had died. To him, the Doctor, Angela had disclosed the fact that she was Krespel's wife, and that Antonia was his daughter; he, Krespel, had better hasten therefore to take charge of the orphan. Notwithstanding that the Councillor was a good deal upset by this news of Angela's death, he soon began to feel that an antipathetic, disturbing influence had departed out of his life, and that now for the first time he could begin to breathe freely. The very same day he set out for F——. You could not credit how heartrending was the Councillor's description of the moment when he first saw Antonia. Even in the fantastic oddities of his expression there was such a marvellous power of description that I am unable to give even so much as a faint indication of it. Antonia inherited all her mother's amiability and all her mother's charms, but not the repellent reverse of the medal. There was no chronic moral ulcer, which might break out from time to time. Antonia's betrothed put in an appearance, whilst Antonia herself, fathoming with happy instinct the deeper-lying character of her wonderful father, sang one of old Padre Martini's [Footnote: Giambattista Martini, more commonly called Padre Martini, of Bologna, formed an influential school of music there in the latter half of the eighteenth century. He wrote vocal and instrumental pieces both for the church and for the theatre. He was also a learned historian of music. He has the merit of having discerned and encouraged the genius of Mozart when, a boy of fourteen, he visited Bologna in 1770.] motets, which, she knew, Krespel in the heyday of his courtship had never grown tired of hearing her mother sing. The tears ran in streams down Krespel's cheeks; even Angela he had never heard sing like that. Antonia's voice was of a very remarkable and altogether peculiar timbre: at one time it was like the sighing of an Aeolian harp, at another like the warbled gush of the nightingale. It seemed as if there was not room for such notes in the human breast. Antonia, blushing with joy and happiness, sang on and on—all her most beautiful songs, B—— playing between whiles as only enthusiasm that is intoxicated with delight can play. Krespel was

at first transported with rapture, then he grew thoughtful—still—absorbed in reflection. At length he leapt to his feet, pressed Antonia to his heart, and begged her in a low husky voice, "Sing no more if you love me—my heart is bursting—I fear—I fear—don't sing again."

"No!" remarked the Councillor next day to Doctor R——, "when, as she sang, her blushes gathered into two dark red spots on her pale cheeks, I knew it had nothing to do with your nonsensical family likenesses, I knew it was what I dreaded." The Doctor, whose countenance had shown signs of deep distress from the very beginning of the conversation, replied, "Whether it arises from a too early taxing of her powers of song, or whether the fault is Nature's—enough, Antonia labors under an organic failure in the chest, while it is from it too that her voice derives its wonderful power and its singular timbre, which I might almost say transcend the limits of human capabilities of song. But it bears the announcement of her early death; for, if she continues to sing, I wouldn't give her at the most more than six months longer to live." Krespel's heart was lacerated as if by the stabs of hundreds of stinging knives. It was as though his life had been for the first time overshadowed by a beautiful tree full of the most magnificent blossoms, and now it was to be sawn to pieces at the roots, so that it could not grow green and blossom any more. His resolution was taken. He told Antonia all; he put the alternatives before her—whether she would follow her betrothed and yield to his and the world's seductions, but with the certainty of dying early, or whether she would spread round her father in his old days that joy and peace which had hitherto been unknown to him, and so secure a long life. She threw herself sobbing into his arms, and he, knowing the heartrending trial that was before her, did not press for a more explicit declaration. He talked the matter over with her betrothed; but, notwithstanding that the latter averred that no note should ever cross Antonia's lips, the Councillor was only too well aware that even B—— could not resist the temptation of hearing her sing, at any rate arias of his own composition. And the world, the musical public, even though acquainted with the nature of the singer's affliction, would certainly not relinquish its claims to hear her, for in cases where pleasure is concerned people of this class are very selfish and cruel. The Councillor disappeared from F—— along with Antonia, and came to H——. B—— was in despair when he learned that they had gone. He set out on their track, overtook them, and arrived at H—— at the same time that they did. "Let me see him only once, and then die!" entreated Antonia. "Die! die!" cried Krespel, wild with anger, an icy shudder running through him. His daughter, the only creature in the wide world who had awakened in him the springs of unknown joy, who alone had

reconciled him to life, tore herself away from his heart, and he—he suffered the terrible trial to take place. B—— sat down to the piano; Antonia sang; Krespel fiddled away merrily, until the two red spots showed themselves on Antonia's cheeks. Then he bade her stop; and as B—— was taking leave of his betrothed, she suddenly fell to the floor with a loud scream. "I thought," continued Krespel in his narration, "I thought that she was, as I had anticipated, really dead; but as I had prepared myself for the worst, my calmness did not leave me, nor my self-command desert me. I grasped B——, who stood like a silly sheep in his dismay, by the shoulders, and said (here the Councillor fell into his singing tone), 'Now that you, my estimable pianoforte-player, have, as you wished and desired, really murdered your betrothed, you may quietly take your departure; at least have the goodness to make yourself scarce before I run my bright hanger through your heart. My daughter, who, as you see, is rather pale, could very well do with some color from your precious blood. Make haste and run, for I might also hurl a nimble knife or two after you.' I must, I suppose, have looked rather formidable as I uttered these words, for, with a cry of the greatest terror, B—— tore himself loose from my grasp, rushed out of the room, and down the steps." Directly after B—— was gone, when the Councillor tried to lift up his daughter, who lay unconscious on the floor, she opened her eyes with a deep sigh, but soon closed them again as if about to die. Then Krespel's grief found vent aloud, and would not be comforted. The doctor, whom the old housekeeper had called in, pronounced Antonia's case a somewhat serious but by no means dangerous attack; and she did indeed recover more quickly than her father had dared to hope. She now clung to him with the most confiding childlike affection; she entered into his favorite hobbies—into his mad schemes and whims. She helped him take old violins to pieces and glue new ones together. "I won't sing again any more, but live for you," she often said, sweetly smiling upon him, after she had been asked to sing and had refused. Such appeals, however, the Councillor was anxious to spare her as much as possible; therefore it was that he was unwilling to take her into society, and solicitously shunned all music. He well understood how painful it must be for her to forego altogether the exercise of that art which she had brought to such a pitch of perfection. When the Councillor bought the wonderful violin that he had buried with Antonia, and was about to take it to pieces, she met him with such sadness in her face and softly breathed the petition, "What! this as well?" By some power, which he could not explain, he felt impelled to leave this particular instrument unbroken, and to play upon it. Scarcely had he drawn the first few notes from it than Antonia cried aloud with joy, "Why, that's me!—now I shall sing again." And, in truth, there was something remarkably striking about

the clear, silvery, bell-like tones of the violin; they seemed to have been engendered in the human soul. Krespel's heart was deeply moved; he played, too, better than ever. As he ran up and down the scale, playing bold passages with consummate power and expression, she clapped her hands together and cried with delight, "I did that well! I did that well."

From this time onwards her life was filled with peace and cheerfulness. She often said to the Councillor, "I should like to sing something, father." Then Krespel would take his violin down from the wall and play her most beautiful songs, and her heart was right glad and happy. Shortly before my arrival in H——, the Councillor fancied one night that he heard somebody playing the piano in the adjoining room, and he soon made out distinctly that B—— was flourishing on the instrument in his usual style. He wished to get up, but felt himself held down as if by a dead weight, and lying as if fettered in iron bonds; he was utterly unable to move an inch. Then Antonia's voice was heard singing low and soft; soon, however, it began to rise and rise in volume until it became an ear-splitting fortissimo; and at length she passed over into a powerfully impressive song which B——had once composed for her in the devotional style of the old masters. Krespel described his condition as being incomprehensible, for terrible anguish was mingled with a delight he had never experienced before. All at once he was surrounded by a dazzling brightness, in which he beheld B——and Antonia locked in a close embrace, and gazing at each other in a rapture of ecstasy. The music of the song and of the pianoforte accompanying it went on without any visible signs that Antonia sang or that B—— touched the instrument. Then the Councillor fell into a sort of dead faint, whilst the images vanished away. On awakening he still felt the terrible anguish of his dream. He rushed into Antonia's room. She lay on the sofa, her eyes closed, a sweet angelic smile on her face, her hands devoutly folded, and looking as if asleep and dreaming of the joys and raptures of heaven. But she was—dead.

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